

# **Beyond the Stone Altar: The “Section Over Heaven of Kansas City”**

## **Fusion of a Pohnpeian Chiefdom: A Sociopolitical Basis for Place**

by

Charles A. Hubbard

Submitted to the graduate degree program in Anthropology and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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F. Allan Hanson, Chair

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Akiko Takeyama

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Abdelmajid Hannoum

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The Thesis Committee for Charles A. Hubbard certifies that this is the approved version of the following thesis:

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# **Abstract**

Charles A. Hubbard

Department of Anthropology

University of Kansas

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The Pohnpeian community in Kansas City has been organized as a traditional section under the authority of a Pohnpeian tribal district chief. This thesis explores the relationship of the social structure of the Pohnpeian community in Kansas City to that of their home island of Pohnpei. The Kansas City section formation also has implications for the concept of place and how people create it and relate to it. The traditional section form of Pohnpeian social organization is transposed in Kansas City complete with traditional feasts, chiefly titles, and political integration with a paramount chieftainship in Pohnpei. Some of the continuities and differences of the deployment of the traditional Pohnpeian section system in Kansas City are considered in this paper. The Kansas City community and its section are situated within the broader scope of displaced Micronesian communities and the more general categories of diaspora, migration, creation of locality, and place.

## Acknowledgments

As with any work, this is the result of the efforts of more than one person. I draw from the writings of Pohnpei scholars, primarily Glenn Petersen (1982a) and David Hanlon (1988, 2004). Petersen studied the Pohnpeian sociopolitical system extensively, and Hanlon in his words “is a child of *Wone*,” an area to which many Pohnpeians in Kansas City have ties. Hanlon also explores the porousness of place, specific to *Wene*, which connects directly with the construction of the Kansas City section and its metaphorical connection to *Pohnleng* in Wene. These authors’ contributions form cornerstones of the edifice this thesis seeks to construct.

My family has been extraordinarily supportive throughout my work on this project. My son, Luke, has tolerated multiple missed ballgames and my withdrawal from participation in Tae Kwon Do with him, where he and my daughter, Julia, carry on in my absence. Julia has become my frequent companion in interacting with our adoptive Pohnpeian family. They both excel in what they do in so many ways. My wife, Theresa, is one of my inspirations for returning to pursue an advanced degree as a nontraditional student to pursue a passion rather than a vocation after having become entrenched in another profession. She has done what I did not think was possible – support and inspire me even more than she did before. My siblings, parents, and grandparents are inspirations to me as well, each in their own unique way. My friend and coworker Go Morita both connected me with Pohnpeians in Kansas City and covered for me at work so I could pursue this interest. I could not have done this without his help.

This thesis is a combination of good fortune, hard work, and fate. It so happens that someone who spent time among Pohnpeians twenty years ago and later decided to pursue anthropology returned home to eventually find the largest community of diasporic Pohnpeians outside of Oceania living in his extended neighborhood. Beyond that I have had the extremely good fortune to work with an advisor who likewise had his first experience with extended fieldwork in

Oceania. While everyone in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Kansas has been very supportive, I doubt that I would have made it to this point without Professor Allan Hanson. Without his background working years ago in Oceania combined with his interest in theory this thesis, if it existed at all, would have taken a very different and I think far less interesting form. His combination of patience, persistence, encouragement, and candor helped to mold this work into something that I think finally passes as anthropological. Beyond that, his dependability, responsiveness, accessibility, creativity, and professionalism are exemplary.

In addition to Dr. Hanson's contributions, Professors Akiko Takeyama and Majid Hannoum were significant contributors to this work. Dr. Takeyama encouraged me to push beyond my resistance to including Pohnpeian voices directly in this paper and make it more ethnographic in nature and more focused theoretically. Though I was unable for various reasons to follow her advice as completely as she may have hoped, I believe her input enriched this work in important ways. Dr. Hannoum shares Dr. Hanson's and my interest in theory and his knowledge and insights in this area augmented the theoretical portion of this work. He also encouraged me to clarify certain areas of background and be more explicit about the Pohnpeian title system. His insights also led me to critique the notion of reverse colonization in ways to which I was blind.

Most of all, I wish to thank *mehn Pohnpei*, wherever they may be. My adoptive parents, Nanei and Soulik, as well as my brothers, Suda, Frankie, and Brandy, and my aunts (especially Biry) and uncles were particularly supportive. The Soumas's family members in Kansas City have been extremely welcoming and generous. Their father should be proud of them. All of the members of the Kansas City community in general, and in particular the section, including Ounken and Lihouken, have been as hospitable and kind as Pohnpeians in Pohnpei. The list could go on, but here it stops to protect the innocent (and not so innocent – you guys know who you are). What is redeeming and worthwhile in this work belongs to others; the errors are mine.

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## I: Introduction

*From the beginning, Pohnpei existed as a divinely sanctioned land. Pohnpei sapw sarawi ehu, “Pohnpei is a holy land,” is the first statement Pohnpeians today make about their island.* – David Hanlon 1988:4

*The word, Pohnpei, ‘Upon a Stone Altar’, implies this linkage of the supernatural and natural worlds between which the people of the island seek to mediate with rituals, ceremonies, and prayers.* – David Hanlon 1988:xxi

### ***Pohnpei***

The Micronesian island of Pohnpei is situated approximately halfway between Honolulu and Manila just north of the equator in the Pacific Ocean (Petersen 1982b:130). It is a volcanic island fringed by a coral reef.<sup>i</sup> Annual rainfall reaches approximately 500 centimeters (197 inches) (ibid). The mountainous interior receives considerably more annual precipitation and is nearly perpetually cloud-covered. Pohnpei’s population was 35,981 according to the 2010 Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) census. Out-migration has become a noteworthy factor (Ballendorf 2005).

Pohnpeian biological heritage is diverse and this is celebrated through origin stories entailing multiple migrations (Bernart 1977, Fischer, et. al. 1977). Interisland voyaging in pre-contact periods provided opportunities for intermarriage with people from different islands (Hanlon 1988, Petersen 2009). Periods of contact involved trade, then successive colonial occupations by the Spanish, Germans, Japanese, and Americans (Gorenflo 1992). Pohnpeians recognize their diverse heritage but what makes them distinctly Pohnpeian in their own words is their *tiahk*, or custom, particularly *tiahk en sapw*, “the custom of the land,” or Pohnpeian customs (Hanlon 1988). Importation of Pohnpeian customs to Kansas City, one of the more frequent landing spots of migrating Pohnpeians, is a particular focus of this work.

The title of this thesis pays homage to two of the works from which it draws: David Hanlon’s (1988) *Upon a Stone Altar: A History of the Island of Pohnpei to 1890*, and Glenn Petersen’s

(1982a) *One Man Cannot Rule a Thousand: Fission in a Ponapean Chieftdom*. As Petersen's work studies the division (fission) of a section in Pohnpei, this work centers around the formation of a Pohnpeian section in Kansas City; its creation constitutes a fusion of Pohnpeian people in diaspora into a traditional Pohnpeian community, physically separated from the "stone altar" (Hanlon 1988) from which they all hail. In this sense, the *Kousapw en Pohnleng en Kansas City* (the Section Over Heaven of Kansas City) exists beyond the traditional bounds of Pohnpei but simultaneously remains a part of it. The bounds of Pohnpei are extended metaphorically via the ritual creation of the Kansas City section through a traditional Pohnpeian ceremony. Further connecting with Hanlon's thoughts noted at the outset of this chapter, the supernatural extension of Pohnpei through the *manaman* (efficacious sacred power) of the paramount chief of Kiti who constituted the Kansas City section connects Pohnpei to the people who live in Kansas City. This phenomenon links Pohnpei to Kansas City and Kansas City to Pohnpei in the minds of Pohnpeians everywhere (though not uniformly and without controversy). According to my information, Kansas City is the *only* location outside the geographical bounds of the island of Pohnpei that features a fully organized and functioning section. More strongly than ever, Kansas City is a prominent place in the Pohnpeian imaginary.

### ***The Focus***

Kansas City has been known to Pohnpeians for decades. I first encountered Pohnpeians in Pohnpei two decades ago. Upon learning that I was from the Kansas City area, dozens of people on multiple occasions related to me how they had a brother, or a cousin, or an aunt, who lived in or had lived in Kansas City. Kansas City has a unique feature compared to other communities of Pohnpeians not living on Pohnpei. These communities range from Guam to Hawaii, to Salt Lake City, Utah, and Charlotte, North Carolina and many points in between. The Kansas City



community has been constituted as a traditional section under the paramount chiefdom, or tribal district, of Kiti.<sup>1</sup> While not all Pohnpeians in Kansas City participate in the section organization and activities, a significant plurality of Kansas City residents do affiliate with the section.

Central to this analysis is how the Kansas City section impacts the Pohnpeians who engage with it and how the section system itself is impacted by its deployment in Kansas City. This leads to an exploration of related concepts of displaced communities, invention of tradition, and production of locality and sense of place in the globalizing world.<sup>2</sup> These concepts are related to this community of Pohnpeians in Kansas City. In attending these several events: section feasts, the Women's Day celebration, the Labor Day baseball tournament, kava markets, and numerous informal activities, I experienced a displacement from the American location that I instinctively knew I inhabited. These events generated an ethos that was distinctly reminiscent of places I had experienced in Pohnpei. This observation led me to question what the concept of place means and how a sense of locality is constructed. Naturally I was curious to see if Pohnpeians shared my sense of being in a place out of place, particularly in these same settings. A condition precedent for this experience is the fact of the displacement of Pohnpeians from Pohnpei.

Pohnpeians in Kansas City have been displaced from their home island of Pohnpei largely by economic factors shaped by colonialism, most recently Post-World War II American colonialism (Hanlon 1998).<sup>3</sup> The Pohnpeian community in Kansas City can be looked at through the lens of displaced Micronesian communities as well as through migration and diaspora more generally. Viewed as such the Kansas City community features hints of immigration, and stronger aspects of migration, relocation, and diaspora. The Kansas City section organization leads to a specific

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<sup>1</sup> The term "traditional" and related markers will be used unproblematically for much of the paper but will be discussed in some detail in Chapter IX.

<sup>2</sup> Invention of tradition will likewise be explored further in Chapter IX.

<sup>3</sup> The colonial experience of Pohnpeians and the various occupations of Pohnpei are addressed briefly in Chapter V.

kind of invention of tradition, production of locality, and related notions of space and place in a unique form of social organization – one which highlights the impact of globalization on social interaction and orientation to the world.

### ***Methodology***

Before going much further, it bears mentioning how I became involved with this group of Pohnpeians living in Kansas City, and how I approached studying this phenomenon of a community of Pohnpeians living in Kansas City. From April of 1992 to April of 1994, I lived in Pohnpei and on Guam almost exclusively among Pohnpeians for a little over two years, including nearly eight months living and working with a grandson of one of the Pohnpeian tribal chiefs. During that time I became fluent in the language and experienced daily life there. That experience led to several personal connections with some of the people in the Pohnpeian Kansas City community that would be uncovered later. Both these personal connections and the immersion in the culture are crucial bases for this research. My facility with the language and ability to establish a preexisting relationship with the people with whom I interacted in Kansas City provided me with more credibility and relatability than I would have otherwise had with them. This often led to more candid communication and more open access to participation in their community than would otherwise be expected.

From August of 2012 through November of 2013, I attended five feast celebrations, a Micronesian Women's Day event, a Pohnpeian baseball tournament that spanned Labor Day weekend, and several dozen other formal and informal activities. I participated in the larger community in formalized section activities and informally with moderate sized groups and with individual families. Through participant observation attending feasts and other group events as well as conversations with individuals in the community I have obtained information about

Pohnpeian section organization and function in Kansas City. In order to ascertain the aspects of section organization in Pohnpei, I have interviewed people in the Kansas City community, specifically some who have recently arrived from Pohnpei and those who have ties to the chiefly hierarchies of Pohnpei. To the extent possible, those involved in the establishment of the Kansas City section have been consulted in an effort to ascertain the conditions surrounding the establishment of the section in Kansas City.

My experience in Pohnpei in the 1990's serves as the primary basis for my ability to ascertain events and places as having a Pohnpeian feel to them. Among the specific aspects that stand out in such interactions are, of course, speaking the Pohnpeian language. This sometimes includes Pohnpeian honorific speech, the deployment of which marks interactions as set off in some way from regular interaction. This occurs most often in Kansas City in section feasts and speeches given at other public events such as the Micronesian Women's Day celebration, and the Labor Day baseball tournament. In addition to language, Pohnpeians have a sense of decorum that differs from that of Americans in important ways, including appropriate attire, eating style, and even expectorating. The meaning of a scheduled event and its coordination differ considerably from what Americans expect. All of these things I experienced first-hand, for this two-year period, providing a basis for comparison and evaluation that allows me to reasonably make the observations and assertions contained in this paper.

Rather than attempt to formulate a specific focus, follow a set schedule of interviews and scripted questions beforehand, I approached this study in a different fashion. I engaged community by making an entry into it and let the interactions that ensued lead me to both the people who were open to my being there and to the concepts they revealed as being important to

them. This was more of a practical choice than an attempt at a progressive research method.<sup>4</sup> Firm schedules and Pohnpeians do not often intersect, which I knew from long experience. Direct questions to Pohnpeians are not infrequently met with suspicion and skepticism; privacy is valued and secrets are guarded.<sup>5</sup> Glenn Petersen's (1982a:11) approach to working with Pohnpeians is utilized here in several ways: few questions are asked directly of them, attention is paid to what they say to one another, and great care is taken to conceal individual identities and not disclose anything embarrassing or compromising. Finally, I wanted them to tell me what they thought was important about their experience in America and their community so I tried to let them talk and guide me.

A significant plurality of Pohnpeian residents in Kansas City work in several Japanese steakhouses in the metropolitan area. After making contact with Pohnpeians in one of these establishments, this method led directly to the primary subject matter of this thesis. During a conversation with one of the chefs, his face lit up and he asked, somewhat conspiratorially, if I had heard there was a section in Kansas City. Initially wary that he was putting one over on me, I decided to go along and indicated to him that I did not. His rendition turned out to be as credible as it was fascinating. I was later told of an upcoming Kansas City section activity by another chef in a separate steakhouse, confirming this revelation. This led to a situation where I was drawn into the community by becoming affiliated with the Kansas City section, particularly through participation in the feast events. After my attendance at the first feast, I was adopted by an older couple, thus obtaining fictive kinship status, and inclusion in most community and

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<sup>4</sup> Indeed it has long been noted that perspective and contingency shape anthropological research (Clifford 1983).

<sup>5</sup> I follow Glenn Petersen's (1982a:10) observations that, "There is no way of knowing, of course, when I have learned a story in its entirety. "Full disclosure" is an impossibility for Ponapeans. To tell anything in its entirety is the equivalent of emptying out one's soul. What I present here is a patchwork that I have pieced together, and I cannot expect any Ponapean to verify it, nor even to agree with it." This notion was confirmed by one of the Pohnpeians with whom I consulted early on in my work with the Kansas City community.

family events. During these events, people often spontaneously explained aspects of the proceedings to me, allowing me to ask related questions. I tried to watch the reactions of both the direct participant in the interaction and those listening to detect if others thought the information was reliable. If there was a hint of disagreement or humor (indicating a possibility of being misled), I asked follow-up questions or consulted others separately at a later time. Attendance at kava markets (which are designed to raise money for families with a particular need) provides another forum for discussion, often for reflection on Pohnpei and how life in America and Pohnpei differ, but are crucially related.

Although my interactions with Pohnpeians were not scripted in any direct way (my presence in their community alone altered it [Clifford 1983]), I frequently made notes of conversations and events. This includes over one hundred pages of fieldnotes after sixty-two different interaction events which often included more than a half-dozen individuals per activity (and sometimes many more). This is further supported by over ten hours of video recordings at the various feasts and other events.

Utilizing the methods and data noted above, I have synthesized the information gathered through observation and discussion with the literature and my own experience. The combination of these approaches provides the basis for the analysis of the Pohnpeian section system in Kansas City and aspects of the Pohnpeian Kansas City community itself. The discussion of social scientific categories and concepts contained in this thesis are based in part upon my reflections on my experience and the comments made by Pohnpeians in the Kansas City community. Sometimes these comments are drawn out explicitly but where that is not possible due to my desire to protect the identity of the people who shared the information, these comments and experiences inform the homogenized statements and assertions that result.

### ***Locating Pohnpeian Kansas City in the Literature***

My search of the literature included publications such as *Oceania*, *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, *Isla: Journal of Micronesian Studies*, *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, *The Journal of Pacific History*, *The Contemporary Pacific*, and the works of several Pohnpei-specific authors. This review revealed no studies of Pohnpeians in diaspora. The closest work to this topic was Francis Hezel's (2001:150) mention of the Pohnpeian community in Kansas City, wherein he estimates its population. Otherwise the record appears to be silent regarding the Kansas City community of Pohnpeians, and only tangentially mentions their community in Guam (Hezel and Levin 1996). Therefore, this paper provides an initial look at Pohnpeians in diaspora, filling a gap in the record.

Despite the paucity of information on Pohnpeians in diaspora, Glenn Petersen (1982a) writes extensively about the Pohnpeian sociopolitical system, particularly the section system, which is also critical to this analysis. His observations include an account of the formation of a new section in Pohnpei, paying particular attention to the social and political ramifications and maneuverings that accompany this process. Saul Riesenbergs (1968) provides considerable detail about the Pohnpeian polity in general, as well as many specifics about the sociopolitical system. Returning to Petersen's work, as will be revisited later, he finds that, "As long as external conditions do not drive Ponapeans from their land, their communities and community organization – the institution of chieftainship – seem destined to survive" (Petersen 1982a:126). This paper details what happens to the Pohnpeian institution of chieftainship when it is found in a community of Pohnpeians separated from their land, thus extending Petersen's research. It provides confirmation of what Petersen (1982a) identified regarding the Pohnpeian section – that it had undergone a metamorphosis from a land-based sociopolitical formation based upon access

to productive soil to a people-based organization based upon matrilineally controlled titles. As the first section not located within the physical bounds of Pohnpei, the advent of the Kansas City section is a manifestation of this shift in basis from land to people and titles.

Although not much has been said about Pohnpeians in diaspora, there are a number of works regarding displaced Micronesians. This dates to some works regarding displaced peoples from the Kiribati chain (Silverman 1971) and the Marshallese (Tobin 1967) within Oceania. James Clifford (1994), Kim Butler (2001), and Nicolas DeGenova (2005), among others, are consulted for general conceptions of migration and diaspora. These works are used to refine the terminology pertaining to various experiences of displacement for purposes of this paper.

More recent studies include Linda Allen's (1997) study of the Marshallese community in Oklahoma and the work of Burton, *et al.* (2001) regarding Marshallese in Orange County, California. Mac Marshall's (2004) look at the migration experience of the Namoluk people is particularly useful. This thesis uses these and other Pacific Islander experiences of migration to establish commonalities with the experience of Pohnpeians in Kansas City. The primary distinction drawn between Pohnpeians and other Micronesians and most all Pacific Islanders is the crucial difference of the Pohnpeian access to the traditional sociopolitical system of Pohnpei in diaspora, particularly in Kansas City.

While a number of conceptual ideas are extracted from and woven back into this discussion of Pohnpeian sociopolitical formations in diaspora, a few are focused on more heavily than others. Some are mentioned rather in passing as I viewed them as too important to be left out entirely but lacked sufficient space to explore them more fully. The principal theoretical concepts that are focused upon and their contributing authors follow.

Arjun Appadurai (1996) is relied upon for conceiving of the production of locality. Hugh Raffles (1999) differentiates between locality and location, and provides a productive definition for the source of locality. Margaret Rodman (1992) and Mac Marshall (2004) note the importance of community with regard to construction of place but location still receives heavy emphasis in their work. The position of this paper is that a heavier emphasis still should be placed on community, particularly on the sociopolitical formations that intersect with location. David Welchmen Gegeo (2001) finds place to be portable, specifically it is in the blood of Pacific Islanders. His position is examined and modified to fit the findings among Pohnpeians. These concepts are extended to the production of place (Appadurai 1996), particularly as it is applied to Pohnpei by David Hanlon (2004). Hanlon's conception of porous and open Pohnpeian places is applied to Kansas City, whereas he had previously analyzed openness of place from the perspective of Pohnpei, particularly Wene in Kiti.

Place is ultimately conceived herein as being based upon a community with shared understandings. Durkheim ([1915] 1965) and Weber ([1922] 1978) are drawn upon for some classic conceptions of community and Benedict Anderson's ([1983] 1991) notion of imagined community is utilized to expand the bounds of the community beyond its typical physical limitations. Shared understandings are what make communities possible and places intelligible. Here Clifford Geertz's (1973) notion of culture as a public phenomenon is incorporated into the notion of place. If culture is public because meaning is, place is public because culture is. Shared meanings and traditions are crucial for intelligible places to exist. Place, tradition, and location intersect in the Kansas City section.

The deployment of the institution of Pohnpeian chieftainship in Kansas City is a marked departure from tradition in some important ways. The Pohnpeian section is a land-based



sociopolitical unit, traditionally requiring Pohnpeian land as its foundation. Additionally, certain traditional practices are changed and the interpretation of proper forms of behavior under custom are altered in this formation. Tradition is being invented or, more accurately, continuously reinvented. Thus, the concept of invention of tradition is explored in connection with this phenomenon, including the work of Eric Hobsbawm (1983), Allan Hanson (1989), Marshall Sahlins (1999), and James Clifford (2001). I assert that the developments related to the Pohnpeian sociopolitical system in connection with migration and diaspora fall within the scope of invention of tradition. This creative deployment of traditional forms and formations marks Kansas City as a Pohnpeian place.

### ***The Feast***

After connecting with a group of friends of friends and family of friends from Pohnpei living in Kansas City, I was told that a *kamadipw*, (which glosses as feast<sup>6</sup>) would soon be held. Intrigued as to what a Pohnpeian feast would look like in Kansas City, I managed to wrangle an invitation to the event. On the evening of the feast in September of 2012 a few dozen of us congregated in one Kansas City suburb for the trek to the site of the feast in another Kansas City suburb some distance away. Our group of seven vehicles descended upon the appointed location late one fall night to find a sporadically lit residential street lined with cars for several blocks. The hosts had also allowed people to park in their driveway which descended steeply to the paved parking area behind their house just outside a walkout basement with three overhead garage doors. As we brought down the large plastic tubs of food we had packed with dozens of separate styrofoam containers and empty five-gallon buckets marked Kikkoman, I noticed that

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<sup>6</sup> *Kamadipw* is translated as feast, but it means “to beat the bushes,” implying that people draw all the productivity out of the land that they can. This is typically so that they can provide tribute to chiefs and to display the worthiness of their kin group via their productivity in connection with their land.

the fall night air had grown crisp in the few hours since we had begun our preparations in the northland. It was now after eleven o'clock and the proverbial party was about to start.<sup>ii</sup>

People milled about outside the home under the clear night sky, lit by a full moon highlighted by an immense lunar halo – a brilliant refraction of a reflection of its ultimate source of light. Soon calls emerged for us to come inside and get started. As I entered the open bay at the end of the building, my first response was shock at how many people were packed into this albeit surprisingly spacious substructure; there were easily one hundred and twenty people inside. No walls obscured the view from one end of the encompassed space to the other. A stairway stood straightaway at the opposite end of the entrance providing access above. Roughly one third of the people were clothed in fire-engine red shirts and another third in canary yellow. The balance of the participants were primarily adult men who wore various clothing from t-shirts to a few collared shirts with jeans and maybe a jacket.

I was ushered to a table in the northwest section of the basement with several other men sitting on upturned five-gallon Kikkoman buckets and an assortment of molded plastic and folding chairs. Ages ranged from early thirties to early fifties. A table to my right and one behind and to my right, closest to the north wall directly opposite the entryway in the east wall, featured primarily older men in their forties and above. Two lines of chairs, upturned Kikkoman buckets, and benches with faded and chipped paint ran from this wall to the open door. These were populated by men as well, most all in their thirties and early forties, a few of whom sat with pants unbuttoned and belts unfastened for maximum comfort. At the center of each of the tables were large bowls of *sakau* (kava<sup>7</sup>) that were periodically stirred and their contents ladled into coconut shell cups to be passed around and imbibed with varying degrees of gusto and

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<sup>7</sup> Kava is the generic Polynesian word for *Piper methysticum*, that acts as a sedative and whose effects are compared to inebriation by Pohnpeians.

moderation. Several men (and a few women) could be heard expectorating loudly to clear their throats of the kava-induced phlegm. While the men mainly occupied benches, buckets, and tables along the north wall and some of the west wall, the women and children alternately sat at tables and on chairs and buckets along the balance of the west wall, rounding onto the south wall. The east wall was alternatively standing room only and a walkway, with preteens, teens, and young adults milling about between activities. The location of the tables for the most prestigious men was in the northwest corner of the structure, situated in such a fashion that it felt like they were looking down and out over the mass of people. Though it seemed that we filled the room to the rafters somehow movement was constant and the atmosphere jubilant.

A man in his thirties speaking in the Pohnpeian honorific language who would serve as the master of ceremonies (MC) for the event called for quiet. The group gradually complied as some exhortations in English were directed at the children. This was followed by a prayer offered by an adult woman who wore a deep red sequined shirt offset by a black jacket. The prayer was filled with Pohnpeian honorifics in the sometimes abrupt but poetic Pohnpeian style. The “Amen” triggered an exchange of containers of food between those wearing red and yellow. People grabbed the food with their hands and ate without any utensils, frequently picking from a neighbor’s platter piled with various items. Foods included the spaghetti, which, along with the hotdogs, stood out against the more traditional rice, bananas, taro, chicken, and pork. Adult women circulated the crowd placing tinseled and flowered leis, as well as crowns of flowers, over and on the heads of many of the guests. The women anointed the arms of several of the guests with coconut oil.

Speeches regarding the significance of section participation, the maintenance of *tiahk* (Pohnpeian tradition), its dissemination to the next generation, and the crucial importance of

community were given and titles (*mwahr* or *lengileng*) to be conferred on men between ages twenty and forty announced.<sup>8</sup> These titles were specific to the Kansas City section, as opposed to other Pohnpeian sections or the structurally higher tribal districts, and often included the section name (*Pohnleng*) as a part of the title to differentiate it from similar titles in other sections. I stepped out for some air to find another fifty or sixty people milling about the backyard and parking area and on up the side of the house where the driveway ran. I later realized that they were generally cycling through the back benches and standing areas running along the north wall. As I started to reenter the building someone I had met prior to this event exited with another individual I knew as a relative of his. A tension surrounded the dyad – somehow palpable but not directly visible. Intrigued, I followed them back outside and engaged with them. Once fully away from the throng, one expressed strong disapproval that one of the conferred titles was inappropriate. It was a tribal district-level title, *not* a section-level title, as would be proper. To him, this breach of tradition was almost unspeakably egregious. After a couple of minutes of venting, he was basically told to let it go by his compatriot and he complied. We went back inside to join the festivities.

Raffles were held whereby contributed prizes were awarded as the winning numbers were drawn by various luminaries starting with the presiding chief. The winners were announced by the MC for each prize. These awards ranged from pillows to food including several twenty-two pound bags of rice and assorted canned meats. The money was collected and tallied and given to a family member of the section chief to be sent to him in Pohnpei. The business of the feast was successfully completed and the program shifted to entertainment.

The highlight of this part of the program was dancing. This was ideally competitive in nature with each of the two divisions marked by the yellow and red clothing alternatively fielding

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<sup>8</sup> The content of one of the speeches and the significance of the titles will be revisited later in this paper.

groups by age – initially young women and older women. The women took their preparations and performances very seriously as evidenced by not only their carefully matched costumes and their coordinated execution but the chatter directed at the opposing group when they performed. The style of the female dancers was generally flowing, much like one would expect of Pacific Islanders with notions shaped by familiar Polynesian dances. The men performed later as well though not with fire or weapons as some of the Polynesian performances but with fast violent motions, at times more like a coordinated martial arts form competition with shouts, stomps, and flourishes. Non-participants alternatively shouted encouragement and catcalls.

No winners were declared but as the MC called the feast to an official close at about four in the morning and people drifted away, it was clear that the night's activities had generally been deemed a success. Pohnpeians from all over Kansas City and beyond had come together and generated a night of festiveness. Men and women displayed coordinated productive efforts and practiced skill. Speeches punctuated the night and the awarding of new titles was of particular interest – and privately expressed controversy. The whole experience felt not like a Kansas City barbeque, or even a family reunion, but rather left me with the distinct impression that I had visited Pohnpei and participated in a traditional chiefly feast – without leaving Kansas City at all. For instance, Americans as a rule do not sit in public with pants undone, do not eat with their hands in private, much less in polite company, and certainly do not engage in hawking up phlegm (especially by women) while a dignitary is speaking. But this is common in Pohnpei, as I experienced many times during the years I spent among them.

The events of the night left me with several questions. What was going on with the yellow/red split? It was clearly a mark of division, but on what basis? Why was the seating pattern such as it was with divisions by gender and age, with an open section? Why did the

groups exchange food with one another? What was going on with the raffle of goods and the contribution of money to an absentee chief? Why were the speeches so raptly attended to by the otherwise unruly crowd? What was the focus on awarding titles about? Why was one so controversial? What was going on with the dancing and the cheers and catcalls based apparently on shirt color? Finally, why did it feel to me like I was back in Pohnpei while sitting in the middle of suburban Kansas City?

### *Overview*

This thesis principally follows my experience with the Pohnpeian community in Kansas City. It starts with the concrete experience of the feasts and other events, but is backgrounded by my two year period of enculturation and contacts two decades ago. This led to the thought process outlined in the structure below. My attempts to situate these concrete experiences begin with a review of the sociopolitical structure of Pohnpei, attending to similarities and differences. It extends to more abstract concepts and analyses found in the literature, which fold back into situating my concrete experience and those that others shared or that I observed. The general structure of this paper tracks my process of analyzing these experiences.

This analysis proceeds with Chapter II which maps Pohnpei onto Kansas City by utilizing a comparison of physical traits, discussing access to community activities in Kansas City, and noting observations on continuities and differences. Chapter III summarizes Pohnpeian section organization and its relationship to physical and social location. Chapter IV looks specifically at the Kansas City section, the history of its formation, discussion of several aspects of the section, including its name and key titles, as well as perceptions of the section – from within and without. Chapter V endeavors to link Pohnpei to Kansas City by explaining the relationship between the two in terms of how Pohnpeians arrived in Kansas City and how the community serves as a

context for a unique ongoing reinvention of Pohnpeian tradition. Chapter VI includes an effort to situate the Kansas City community in the broader context of displaced communities and discusses some conceptions of displacement, diaspora, relocation, and migration. Chapter VII contains a discussion of production of locality particularly as applied to the Kansas City community. Chapter VIII discusses place and conceives of it as based on community, noting the factors constructing place in the Kansas City community, particularly the sociopolitical basis for place found in the Kansas City section. Chapter IX reviews the crucial concept of invention of tradition, reviewing how it underlies the extension of section organization to Kansas City and modification of Pohnpeian traditions. Chapter X asserts that the section brings Pohnpei to Kansas City, that it is a Pohnpeian place and answers some potential objections to this assertion. Chapter XI proceeds to summarize the findings and arguments of the essay as a whole.

My basic thesis is that the traditional section system of Pohnpei has been transposed to the Kansas City community with varying degrees of continuity, discontinuity, and change, following salient principles inherent in Pohnpeian culture and social structure. These changes extend not just to the Kansas City community, but feed back to the sociopolitical system of Pohnpei proper, generating change to the parent system in a continuous process of ongoing reinvention of tradition and traditional practices (Chappell 1999). The transposition of the traditional Pohnpeian section system to the Kansas City community constitutes Kansas City as a unique place in the minds of Pohnpeians. It is both America *and* Pohnpei simultaneously with alternating degrees of emphasis depending on the particular context and social situation. The relative spatial and geographical features of Pohnpei and Kansas City, as experienced by Pohnpeians, will be briefly noted next to establish some of the physical context in which this occurs, as well as to provide more detail of the context of these experiences.

## II: Mapping Pohnpei onto Kansas City

*[Pohnpei] is the largest of Micronesia's Eastern Caroline Islands, in what is currently the United States Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. [...] It is a high island, a legacy of ancient volcanoes that rose from the ocean's floor. Its 600-750 m. peaks catch the moist trade winds as they cross from the east, providing nearly 500 cm. of rainfall each year. Because this rainfall is distributed quite evenly throughout the year, and because of the rich volcanic soil and the continual warmth of the equatorial sun, [Pohnpei] is a garden island, as nearly an earthly paradise as one might seek to find. – Glenn Petersen 1982b:130*

### ***Situating the Community***

Interstate 435 (I-435) encircles much of the Kansas City metropolitan area. Some suburbs lie outside the ring it forms and others within it. The Micronesian island Pohnpei is likewise now ringed about by a road with some settlements falling outside of it on the coasts and others inside towards the mountainous interior. This occurs on a different scale and in a remarkably different setting as compared to Kansas City. The concrete jungle of Kansas City serves as a substitute for the lush tropical rainforest of Pohnpei, a jungle setting of a more customary sort. In both settings clusters of Pohnpeian settlements dot the landscape on either side of the circular roads swallowed up and camouflaged by the surrounding jungles of very different natures. This contributes to strikingly similar and divergent effects on the respective communities.<sup>iii</sup>

The road in Pohnpei links various communities to each other within the island setting. The Kansas City road system offers an interconnecting pathway for Pohnpeians to physically connect with each other, to create a community in a foreign land, localized in the Kansas City area. It was traveling along a stretch of I-435 that I was led to my first experience of a Pohnpeian community event outside of Pohnpei discussed above, and expanded hereafter.

### ***The Road to Pohnpeian Kansas City***

A caravan of Pohnpeians and I, the solitary *mehn Wai* (American), trekked from one localized cluster of Pohnpeians in working class Kansas City suburbs to another in order to attend the community feast detailed above. Upon our arrival, the typically discreet Pohnpeians



did not remark directly about my presence, obviously anomalous though it was. Most who had not previously met me personally studiously ignored me; a few who did not know me from my visits to the Japanese steakhouses in which a plurality of Pohnpeians in Kansas City work greeted me with restrained “hellos.” Those who had met me before were more familiar in their greetings. The reserve of those who had not met me previously lifted almost immediately upon hearing my response in their own language. Many used the question, “Where did you learn Pohnpeian,” or a similar permutation, to begin to figure out where I fit in connection with them and their community. My answers varied somewhat based on the interlocutor but generally it was, “Same as you, Pohnpei.” Most were eager to hear where I had been on Pohnpei and attempted to ascertain whether we knew any of the same people – particularly their family members. Several asked what my title was and were surprised to hear that I did not have one after living on Pohnpei for so long as every responsible adult interacting in the Pohnpeian world should have a title of some sort.

The occasion for this particular gathering was the *Kamadipw en Soumas*, the feast in honor of the section chief in September of 2012. The preceding month had featured the *Kamadipw en Wahu*, or feast of respect in honor of the paramount chief of the tribal district. The *Kamadipw en Kapasmwar*, which is given by the new title holders on behalf of the section, took place the month following the feast for the section chief. In Kansas City the feast for new title holders takes on the dual aspect and function of honoring section’s cup-bearing chief (*Paliendahl*) who serves in an executive capacity for the section.

The frequent coincidence of feasting, feast practices, and titles is not a random coincidence or a recent development, according to Pohnpei scholar David Hanlon (1988). He finds their intertwined roots deep in the rich soil of Pohnpeian history dating to at least the Saudeleur era

(1000 AD). The Pohnpeian sociopolitical system and feasting found critical elaboration under the conqueror/liberator Isokelekel<sup>9</sup> (1500 AD) (Rainbird 2004), “Under Isohkelekel, Madolenihmw became the most elaborate and centralized political entity on the island. Borrowing from the polity established by the Saudeleurs, the conqueror drew up an extensive title system to meet the ceremonial and administrative needs of feasting” (Hanlon 1988:22). The evolution of the present system of titles and feasting extends to the culture-hero Isokelekel and beyond to the Saudeleur era (and possibly beyond that extending to the six initial voyages colonizing Pohnpei dating to at least the year 0 BCE) (Bernart 1977, Petersen 1982a, Petersen 1999, Petersen 2009). Pohnpeian feasts provide an ideal occasion to explore the intersection of chieftainship, prestige economy, and traditional culture of Pohnpei (Shimizu 1987).

### ***Initial Observations on Continuity and Difference***

The section feasts provide a glimpse of some of the community related activities that occur in the Pohnpeian community in Kansas City. While there are a number of interesting differences manifested as Pohnpeian community organization is transposed to the Kansas City setting, much of the underlying tradition and structure remains in the resulting formations. These interrelated issues will be taken up again later. Some initial observations on the section feast practices follow:

1. Important section feasts are hosted by prominent section members under the authority of the section chief within the section itself in Pohnpei and in Kansas City.
2. Section feasts in Pohnpei take place in a traditional feasthouse, usually that of one of the chiefs. Similar activities in Kansas City take place in the home of the cup-bearing chief.

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<sup>9</sup> Isokelekel is the culture hero credited with liberating Pohnpei from the sometimes brutal rule of the Saudeleur dynasty which may have lasted as long as 700 years (Ayers 1983:136). This history is covered at length by Hanlon (1988), Bernart (1977) and Fischer et al. (1977).

3. In Pohnpei chiefs sit on raised platforms at the back of the feasthouse. Women traditionally flank them on the platform running the length of the feasthouse on one side and men on the other. Men preparing kava, women preparing food, and children and others cycle in and out in the center area at ground level. The expression of this pattern of activity presents differently in the cup-bearing chief's house in Kansas City but the orientation of the high-ranking men in the back, women on one side and men on the other, with food, dance, and other preparatory activities in the center obtains in modified form.
4. The food exchanged in Kansas City substitutes some distinctly American fare with what I experienced in Pohnpei in the 1990's. Kansas City food features hot dogs, spaghetti, ribs, even cake, in addition to rice, rice and bananas with coconut cream, fried bananas, and taro. Pohnpei feasts would have substituted roast pig, breadfruit (prepared multiple ways), yams, sweet potatoes, and fermented breadfruit for the American food items.
5. A multitude of feasts occur at the section level in Pohnpei. Some of these also take place in Kansas City. Most noteworthy are the feast of respect for the paramount tribal chief, followed by the feast for the section chief, and the feast of the title-recipients. Salient modifications of these feasts in Kansas City are that the first-fruits and tribute obligations to the paramount tribal chief, the section chief, and the cup-bearing chief are combined with the three feasts mentioned here. In Pohnpei, there are no separate feasts for the cup-bearing chief, whereas in Kansas City the title-recipients' feast is a part of a feast for the cup-bearing chief. At least one Pohnpeian views this addition of a direct tribute-raising feast for the executive chief to indicate that the Kansas City section is destroying tradition (*kawehla tiahk*). Another apparent departure in Kansas City from traditional feast

practices in Pohnpei is that the section chief in Kansas City is not present in his section. The tribute offerings sometimes take the form of cash raised via the raffles at the feasts in Kansas City held for section-level events. The first-fruits offerings raised via the respect feast for the paramount chief are done through a lottery involving cash only.

6. Kava remains central to the Pohnpeian feasts (and other practices) in Kansas City, although preparation and presentation vary. The use of the respect language in the feast context continues to be extensive in Kansas City.<sup>10</sup> Competitive tribute (food, goods, labor, and cash) and performance (dance and speech) take on modified form in Kansas City. Each of these aspects seems to retain much of their underlying structure and meaning, however. The more typical inter-sectional competition in Pohnpei takes on an intra-sectional character in the feast activities in Kansas City, as designated by the yellow/red:north/south splits.<sup>11</sup> However, intra-sectional competition does occur in Pohnpei (Petersen 1982a) and what appears much as inter-sectional competition is emerging in Kansas City and beyond in the U.S. mainland as evidenced in the baseball tournament and Micronesian Women's Day dance competition.<sup>12</sup>
7. Titles are critical for section organization in Pohnpei and in Kansas City. They order section activities, identify people, and suggest where they fit in social interaction. A title is necessary for participation in feast events as people in the feasthouse can only be addressed by their titles, not by common names. There is considerable continuity here

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<sup>10</sup> Pohnpeians utilize a common speech for regular interaction, but feature an honorific language that is structured to generally abase the speaker and exalt others (generally, but not exclusively, chiefs). The basic purpose is to demonstrate simultaneous humility and respect. These honorifics are most completely deployed at feasts, but are also found extensively in religious contexts, especially prayers, as well as in some daily interaction.

<sup>11</sup> These contrasting color assignments are not permanent, but vary from activity to activity.

<sup>12</sup> This featured groups organized by both geographic locale, as well as Pohnpeian tribal affiliation, Kansas City section membership with its Kiti tribal district ties, and an emergent section of Pohnpeians in the continental United States based strictly on Madolenihmw tribal district affiliation.

though not without some slippage, as noted above with the controversy over the use of tribal district titles at the (hierarchically lower) section level. This is a significant breach of tradition in the minds of some – enough that one feast-goer had to be calmed down when he observed such an egregious act. There is some reciprocal influence on traditional Pohnpeian interpretations of title eligibility based on location of the title-holder which be explored in Chapter IX.

These items indicate that, as it pertains to Pohnpeian sociopolitical structure, the more things change, the more they stay the same. While many traditional forms of social structure viewed through feast practices translate from Pohnpei to Kansas City relatively unmodified, many also change. Even those that change feature the underlying traditional social structure and cultural norms operative on Pohnpei. Pohnpeian tradition is creatively deployed in Kansas City resulting in an ongoing reinvention of tradition manifested here in the interrelated sociopolitical structure and feast practices (Shimizu 1987:129).

The deployment of Pohnpeian section organization in Kansas City installs a structure based on construction of Pohnpeian place. The Pohnpeian word *kousapw* herein translated as section means “land built-up” and implies that this is done by people, for productive use by people. In other words, people make places, and places shape people. Pohnpeian place is significantly influenced by positioning within the section. Following is an overview of what makes up a Pohnpeian section and the context in which it is generated.

### **III: Pohnpeian Section Organization**

*In appearance, sections are simply political subdivisions of the paramount chiefdoms, beholden and subordinate to the Nahnmwarki, and organized primarily as his local administrative fiefs. In practice, sections are much more than this. They are the fundamental units of Ponapean communal life. – Glenn Petersen 1982a:18*

#### ***Physical Location and Position***

Geographical borders of sections are somewhat fluid in Pohnpei as they are based on membership of families allied with the section and their related farmsteads as well as tribal district membership (Petersen 1982a). A Pohnpeian section exists in a sort of dynamic equilibrium, following Bateson's (1935) general concept of culture, in terms of both group membership and the related geographic location.<sup>13</sup> Pohnpeian sections historically exist only on Pohnpei itself. Sections have names and histories with relevance and salience to Pohnpeians, especially to the specific section members (Petersen 1982a).

Ultimately, section existence and location is based on the physical location of section members relative to Pohnpeian tribal districts.<sup>iv</sup> However, changes in section membership and boundaries of sections do occur. Participation in section activities by individuals and families vary through time. Individual and family position in the section is based on a complex and dynamic interaction of ascription, achievement, and political connections and considerations.

#### ***Social Location and Position***

##### ***Within Sections***

This positioning is manifest primarily in the titles that men hold in the section itself. Titles are awarded by a section chief, he of the preeminent (clan-specific) lineage of the section established by settlement priority (Riesenberg 1968, Petersen 1982a). Virtually every active

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<sup>13</sup> Bateson applies this term to culture's maintenance of coherence amid change; it is here meant to imply the same principle in a different context. The context is related as Petersen (1982a) finds the Pohnpeian section to be the basic unit of society that reproduces culture.

adult male section member has a section title, and those who do not will receive one at some point. A Pohnpeian section generally features two lines of titles. One runs under the *Soumas*, which translates literally “face of the clan” and we interpret as *section chief*. The other is below the *Paliendahl*, which translates as the “side of the cup” and is known as the *cup-bearing or executive chief*. These represent generally sacred and secular divisions, respectively, and mirror the principal chiefly lines at the tribal district level (ibid).

### *Tribal Districts*

Pohnpei is split into five tribal districts based on the five tribes (*wehi*, meaning turtle or state) of Pohnpei that survived into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The tribes are made up of clans (*sou*, which can also mean sun or placenta) though the eighteen Pohnpeian clans can be found in virtually every tribal district (Riesenberg 1968) with varying densities.<sup>14</sup> The clans are ranked within each tribe based ideally upon settlement priority (Riesenberg 1968, Petersen 1982a). The five tribal districts, roughly in order of prestige, are Madolenihmw, Kiti, U, Sokehs, and Net.

Each of the tribal districts is comprised of multiple sections. Sections are sometimes referred to as minor chiefdoms whereas districts are designated paramount chiefdoms (Petersen 1984a:112). Section activity drives Pohnpeian social activity, including the frequent feasts (Petersen 1982a, Shimizu 1987). Sections draw legitimacy from below through clan lineage connection to the land and from above via the sacred mandate of the tribal district chief.

As noted previously, the tribal district is organized primarily under two chiefly lines.<sup>15</sup> The clan lineage which establishes tribal district settlement priority – this is at least as much a

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<sup>14</sup> Petersen (2009) notes that many of these clans are found on multiple Micronesian islands and that Micronesians consider clan members on other islands to be relatives.

<sup>15</sup> There is a crucially important third line, which exists in all tribal districts (and some sections, particularly in the tribal district of U), largely based on the apparently defunct *Samworo* (priestly line). Its present formation is known as *Koanoat* (or chief’s food – it is ambiguous as to who is feeding whom or who may be being consumed

political and discursive construction as a historical fact – has the mandate to appoint the tribal paramount chief, *Nahnmwarki* or “master of titles,” herein *paramount chief* (Riesenberg 1968). A separate historically or politically related clan lineage controls the secular chiefly line of the *Nahnken* (hereinafter *executive chief*). The executive chief is ideally the son of the paramount chief. The paramount and executive chiefs are of different clans because Pohnpei is an exogamous matrilineal society (ibid). Consequently a paramount chief cannot pass on eligibility for paramount chieftainship to his son, as they are not of the same clan. Ideally his wife will be of the clan eligible for executive chieftainship thus making his son eligible for that position. In turn, his son would ideally marry a woman from the clan eligible for paramount chieftainship, keeping the principles of exogamous matriliney sacrosanct but forming a dynastic connection between the paramount and executive chieftainships, retaining power, specifically through control of title assignments, within the family.

The “master of titles” designation of the paramount chiefs of Pohnpei is apt as paramounds exert ultimate control over the assignment (and removal) of titles. While notable restrictions are placed on the granting of titles within the paramount and executive lines due to the principle of ascription, paramount chiefs have considerable discretion in the granting of honorary titles at the tribal district level – and use this to their advantage.<sup>16</sup> By controlling each section chief title within their respective tribal districts, paramount chiefs have influence over the titles of every section member in their domain. The difference between the tribal district and the section levels of social organization in Pohnpei is of crucial importance. The two are intricately interwoven and inseparable in practice but some conceptual distinctions need to be clearly delineated.

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here) or *Dehde* (literally “evident,” “known,” notables). This line is not based on ascription at all but strictly on achievement (now mostly economic production but historically in warfare) and political affiliation.

<sup>16</sup> Paramount chiefs are known to grant these prestigious honorary titles to members (elected, appointed, and otherwise employed) of the Western-style government, extending their power into what was intended by the U.S. government to be free of traditional chiefly influence (Petersen 1984, Hezel 2001:131).



Some of the interrelationships between the two levels are noted first. The section is partially but crucially dependent upon the tribal district through the paramount chief for legitimacy. A section cannot exist but for the applicable tribal paramount's mandate. Conversely, the tribal district is comprised of sections and the paramount chief draws his sustenance from contributions from section members via feasts and first-fruits offerings organized by the section chiefs.

The paramount is thus dependent upon the sections and the productivity of section members. The efforts of the section members are spurred on by the requirement to show respect to the paramount and to demonstrate the productive capacity of the section through drawing all that can be drawn from the land. The Pohnpeian word for feast (*kamadipw*) translates literally "to beat the bushes." This means that landholding lineages draw all of productivity out of the land that they can (Keating 1998:407). Despite the obligation for the people to give much, excessive retention of the proceeds from these activities by chiefs is viewed as bad form. The feasts while competitive are also redistributive – sometimes immediately and sometimes with some lag (Petersen 1999:387-388). This results in an interaction of land, legitimacy, and social location, of production, consumption, display, competition, and redistribution. This is facilitated by the drive to obtain and maintain social position, manifest in the titles.

#### *Section-District Distinctions*

Some of the important distinctions between the section and district levels follow. The tribal districts provide the ultimate physical boundaries for sections. As a rule, sections exist within tribal districts and are subject to tribal affiliation. Sections provide the basis for social structure. The tribal district organizes the specific sections as sections in and through the paramount chief. Tribal district titles are largely ascriptive and very prestigious. They are recognized within every section of the district and even in other tribal districts (Riesenberg 1968, Petersen 1982a).

Honorary tribal district titles carry a significant amount of prestige as well. Certain men can attain higher titles within the tribal district by progressing along the “path of titles” (*ahlen mwahr*). Ascription grants access but achievement and politics largely determine progression in the dozens of available ranked titles in each of the two hereditary lines at the tribal district level.<sup>17</sup>

The section level titles generally require only residence within the section for eligibility. Achievement and political considerations enter into the mix to be sure. The principal exception to this flexibility is that the section chief must be of the right clan and lineage within the clan, though the paramount chief has some discretion in determining who qualifies (Petersen 1982a). This flexibility is not absolute, as the section members also attempt to influence the selection of their section chief, section name, and territorial expanse (*ibid*). The tribal district level focuses on ideal organization, inspiring productivity, and conferring legitimacy. The section level focuses on practical organization, executing productive activity, and confirming legitimacy by displaying productivity in connection with the land within the section (literally land built up for productive purposes). Productivity is often manifest at feasts which occasion drawing productivity from land. Section titles are generally conferred by the section chief based on an individual’s commitment to the section as well as political considerations. There is a less formal path of titles at work in sections which corresponds to their more flexible and mutable structure as compared to tribal districts which tend to be relatively more rigid.

The section system seems to have grown out of the relationship of landholding kin groups which owed some form of fealty to the paramount chief of their tribal district (Petersen 1999:402). It may be that the former *kaun en keinek* (lord of the lineage) developed into the

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<sup>17</sup> Some titles in the paramount and executive lines are accessible to only certain lineages within the clan; others have more flexibility.

section chief as basic political organization morphed from landholding lineages into larger groups featuring a primary lineage claiming settlement priority in the area but including groups of other lineages from the same clan or other clans (Petersen 1999:402, Petersen 2006a). Recall that the word section here glosses the Pohnpeian term *kousapw* meaning “land built up.” A section therefore is tied both to a piece of land that the group has built up and to the group of people who built it – it implies both location and population, place and people (Petersen 1982a:19, Petersen 1999:402). Because each section is responsible for providing first-fruits offerings and other tribute to the paramount chief, the paramountcy benefits from having as many prosperous and functioning sections as possible under his authority (Petersen 1982a:72).

### *Systematizing Pohnpeian Titles*

*Being Pohnpeian is like being in the Army. The older you are, the higher your rank. This is clearest through our titles....* – Pohnpeian man living in Kansas City (approximately fifty-five years of age)

One could well ask, “How do these titles constitute or overlay the Pohnpeian sociopolitical system?” As this opening quotation indicates, Pohnpeians conceive of the title system as being a ranking system. One enters the system upon receiving one’s first title, some at a very young age, depending on their sociopolitical connections and the particular clan and lineage heritage. This latter aspect is given salience by the aspects discussed in the preceding portions of this chapter. Certain clans and lineages of clans have rights to given titles in the respective sections and districts of Pohnpei. The Pohnpeian title system is like an age-grade system but it is more than that. Age and title prestige only roughly coincide. As one ages, one generally succeeds to more highly ranked titles as older members of the polity vacate their positions. In this respect, the Pohnpeian polity is a gerontocracy. However, the system balances the principles of ascription and achievement (Petersen 1982a) meaning in this case that sometimes younger individuals can accede to higher titles, advancing beyond their age group and skipping over their elders. Though

generally once one has entered onto the path of titles (*ahlen mwahr*), higher ranking titles are succeeded to in an orderly fashion as people move up the ranked titles, like following a stair-stepped path ascending to the dais of the paramount title of a given line.

This is complicated by the fact that there are so many polities and subpolities within Pohnpei. The five tribal districts each have their three lines of titles with dozens of titles in each line. The two hereditary tribal district lines adhere to the path of titles metaphor most strictly, the third honorary line less so. The dozens of sections comprising each of the five districts likewise are comprised of two (and sometimes three) lines of title-holders running dozens deep in ranked succession. I asked my conversation partner quoted above if we could liken the section level titles to the enlisted members of the Army and the tribal district level titles as the commissioned officers. He found this to be an apt analogy. While I lack the expertise to fit this comparison neatly into the Army ranking system, the split into two primary levels, with ranking NCO's (non-commissioned officers) handling the day-to-day affairs, ordering and overseeing activities, with the commissioned officers providing the structure, oversight, and general direction fits well here. Typically in both the Army and the Pohnpeian sociopolitical system, the older members will be the highest ranking at both levels (enlisted/commissioned;section/tribal district).

Titles carry with them inherent intelligibility. As with the Army and a four-star general, if a Pohnpeian utters, "The *Nahnmwarki* says ..." or "The *Nahnmwarki* did ...," images of rank, authority, power, and worth immediately come to mind. Like a high-ranking general even when the *Nahnmwarki* is questioned it is generally done with respect. Other high-ranking titles likewise carry prestigious connotations. For example the second-ranking title in (now all) of the five tribal districts is *Wasahi*, and the fifth is generally *Nahnawa*. The literal meaning of *Wasahi* may be tied to the Pohnpeian honorific word *wasahile* which means "face" but this word occurs

only in the respect language implying that this titleholder represents the tribe setting it on a plane above the more common but still important *Soumas* or “face of the clan” at the section level. *Nahnawa* is translated by Riesenberg (1968:10) as “Lord of endearment” or “Dear lord,” marking this titleholder as one to be held in high regard.

As discussed above the tribal district level confers legitimacy upon sections; by its authority and the *manaman* (sacred efficacy) of the tribal district chiefs sections draw their mandate. The sections have at least two (sometimes three) series of dozens of ranked titles. As has been mentioned, the two most crucial are known generally as the *Soumas* and *Paliendahl* meaning, respectively, “face of the clan” and “side of the plate” or “cup-bearing” chief. These descriptions capture the critical functions of the preeminent section-level chiefs, the section chief and the executive chief. The section chief represents the ancestral connection with the land and occupies the position as the legitimate head of the people in the area as his ancestors have rights to productivity due to their preeminent settlement. In a way he serves as a figurehead or “face of the clan.” The executive chief customarily carries out the business of the section, which is primarily participation in productive feasts. The productivity of the section members is taken in and redistributed to section members according to rank (Petersen 1982a). This gathering and redistribution often utilizes plates (an alternative translation of *Paliendahl* is “half a plate”) and the ever-important *sakau* (kava) rituals take place with cups of *sakau* being presented in a ritualized order to feast participants (Riesenberg 1968, Petersen 1982a). This serves to illustrate both the literal interpretation of titles and their functions as was also discussed regarding the *Nahnmwarki*, *Wasahi*, and *Nahnawa* above.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Riesenberg (1968) discusses the titles, their meanings, and functions in detail. His work contains ranked successions at each of the five tribal district levels and a number of section and executive chief listings.

By tying the polity together in this way – at the section and structurally higher tribal district levels – Pohnpeian titles integrate each tribal district. Each of the five tribal districts is ideally independent but due to the cross-cutting ties of kinship and clanship all of the tribes are tied together. As was mentioned the tribes can be loosely ranked in order of prestige as follows: Madolenihmw, Kiti, U, Sokehs, and Net (Riesenberg 1968). Accordingly a paramount chief of Madolenihmw outranks one holding the same title from Sokehs. This roughly corresponds for other titles though there can be ambiguities that lead to disagreements and hurt feelings as Petersen (1982a) observes. This ranking comes into stark relief in both seating position at feasts and redistribution of tribute offered at feasts. This redistribution of tribute (most often food) is a particularly strong indication of whether one's title in fact corresponds to the esteem in which one is held by the chiefs supervising the feasts and redistribution.

Returning to the question at the outset of this portion of the essay, titles are crucial to Pohnpeian sociopolitical organization as they rank all members of the Pohnpeian polity at all levels of the various tribal districts and sections. All members are implicated by titles because all responsible adult males have titles of their own. Many adult women do as well but all adult women have companion titles tied to their husbands' titles. Children of high-ranking parentage or clan membership are likewise colored by the titles to which they are related.

I have only known one adult male who admitted to not having a title of some sort. No doubt many others have a similar experience but they are still in the extreme minority. As will be clear from this man's experience there are strong reasons for both wanting to have a title and for not wanting to have to admit to not having one. This young man had immigrated to Guam as a teenager and thus did not come of age in Pohnpei lessening his chance for being awarded a title. A group of three Pohnpeian men in their early twenties were discussing their titles (circa 1993)

and he sheepishly admitted that he did not have one. One of his compatriots who had just declared his own respectable title said something to the effect of “Don’t lie in front of these Americans, man. You should be proud of your title. *Kirou Poahr* (“Lord of the Butt-Wipers”) is an extremely prestigious title of *Mehn Nanwel* (“The People of the Jungle”)!” The room roared with laughter with one notable exception. That was the most embarrassed I have ever seen a Pohnpeian. This is illustrative of how people without titles are viewed in Pohnpeian society – unsocialized, unsophisticated jungle-dwellers – as worthless butt-wipes. In the United States the jungle association would be similar to being cast as a “kin-marryin’ hillbilly.” *Kirou Poahr* apparently translates pretty directly.

Pohnpeians can and sometimes do lose their titles. This matter is not taken lightly. If someone is struggling to meet their obligations (the main prerequisite for obtaining and retaining a title) they are gently reminded of their responsibilities. According to a fifty-five year-old Pohnpeian man in Kansas City if one lacks productive land or animals from which to produce tribute he will be given rights to land and granted livestock (primarily pigs) by kin and/or ranking members of his polity to enable him to produce and meet his obligations. If this fails he can lose his title and suffer the social stigmatization of *Kirou Poahr*. Alternatively he may revert to a lesser title that he also holds (as one can hold multiple titles) or receive a title in another section to which he may have some kinship or affinal kinship tie.

As another fifty-five year-old Pohnpeian man in Kansas City told me absent an active title one cannot be recognized within the Pohnpeian feasthouse – the preeminent social setting. As we will return to again later, another reason for losing one’s title is emigration. The Kansas City section offers a remedy to this challenge. Returning to one of the main lines of inquiry of this

thesis – how did such a Pohnpeian land-based formation as a Pohnpeian section come to be in Kansas City?



#### IV: The Kansas City Section

*When the Nahnmwarki of Kiti came to Kansas City, we pounded sakau, the Nahnmwarki drank the first cup, and he formed the kousapw of Kansas City as an official section under his authority [manaman]. – Pohnpeian eyewitness and participant in the formation process of the Kansas City section.*

*Pohnpeians have shown themselves capable of adapting creatively and constructively. In short, Pohnpeians have managed to survive successfully in a modern world not totally of their own making and not completely within their power to control. – David Hanlon 1988:xix*

##### **Section Formation**

A long-time Pohnpeian resident of the Kansas City area spearheaded the movement for section organization in Kansas City. His reported motivations, which were shared by many others, will be noted below. He hailed from the tribal district of Kiti and was married to a woman whose family was likewise from the Kiti district, specifically the Wene area. His wife is also a member of the current section chief's family. This aspiring section founder, with the collaboration of his son-in-law, himself of a ranking clan in the neighboring Madolenihmw tribal district, approached the paramount chief of the Kiti chiefdom in person on Pohnpei with a proposition to organize the Kansas City area into a traditional Pohnpeian section.<sup>19</sup>

Our aspiring section founder was a man familiar with traditional tribal governance and was reportedly respected in both Kansas City and in Pohnpei. The alliance with his prominent son-in-law set the stage for a successful outcome. Upon visiting the Kansas City area following the exploratory trip to Pohnpei by our aspiring founder and his key collaborator, the paramount chief of Kiti held a meeting at which time the *Kousapw en Pohnleng en Kansas City* was constituted as an official section under the domain of the paramount chief of the Pohnpeian tribal district of Kiti.<sup>v</sup> This roughly translates as “The Section Over Heaven of Kansas City.” In recognition of his efforts and skills the founder was given the title of *Soumaka en Pohnleng en Kansas City* by

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<sup>19</sup> The son-in-law himself held high title before moving from Pohnpei, at which time his title was forfeit, by traditional imperative. His brother is now (but was not then) the paramount chief of Madolenihmw.

the paramount chief and was recognized as the first section chief of Kansas City. *Soumaka* is a title frequently given to the *Soumas* (face of the clan) of a section. The first section chief of Kansas City has since passed away and his title was awarded to the oldest brother of his widow's family.

### ***Geographical Location of the Section***

As has been mentioned, section borders are fluid based on self-ascribed affiliation by family units but sections typically have a density at their center and fall within the borders of the tribal district whose paramount chief's authoritative mandate gives them legitimacy. With the notable exception of the current section chief himself, most of the Kansas City section members live in the Kansas City metropolitan area. Some members retain Kansas City section membership upon return to Pohnpei, possibly in part due to the section chief setting a relevant precedent. However, people living in Neosho, Missouri are not considered to be Kansas City section members but they are welcomed at section feasts should they want to attend. This places the Kansas City area as the geographic region covered by the section. The fact that it is outside of Pohnpei itself is a new permutation of the traditional section system.

### ***The Section Name***

The Kansas City section is commonly referred to as *Kousapw en Kansas* or *Kousapw en Kansas City* rather than the more formal full name *Kousapw en Pohnleng en Kansas City*. The distinction between the common usage and the formal appellation may seem minor but the import may be significant. The word *Pohnleng* glosses as “over the sky” or “over heaven.” This seemingly ties the section to Pohnpei via the method of transportation people used to connect the two places – air travel (over heaven). This meaning does have application but it is secondary, or concomitant, at best. Access to Kansas City by Pohnpeians is initially obtained by going over

the sky. The section is further divided into north and south known as *Pohlang en Pihr Kohdahla* and *Pahlang en Pihr Kohdihdo*, respectively. These names are both oriented to the airport as well. *Pihr* means flight and these translate roughly as, up there, going above the airport, and down here, coming from the airport.

The more concrete relation, revealed by the section founder's son-in-law, is that Pohnleng is a place in Pohnpei adjacent to the section known as *Ohlapel* which means "the taboo man." This is located in the Wene area of Kiti and has special significance to the section chief. This Ohlapel area was home to the *Soukisenleng* or "Master of Part of Heaven" who was a key historical figure as a person in the liberation of Pohnpei from the Saudeleurs (Hanlon 1988, Bernart 1977) and as an institutional position in the indigenous religion of Pohnpei (Falgout 1987). This title subsequently became associated with and subsumed by the title of the paramount chief of Kiti (Hanlon 1988). The metaphorical tie to such a historically significant section of Pohnpei marks the Kansas City section with prestige and links it to Pohnpei in the minds of Pohnpeians.

### ***Section Titles***

As has been mentioned, the literal meaning of the paramount chief's title, which is now the prevailing title of the paramount chiefs of all five tribal districts, is master of titles.<sup>20</sup> Person is tied to title, title is tied to clan, clan is tied to settled land and ancestors who did the settling; all are tied to Pohnpei Sarawi, "sacred Pohnpei" or "on the holy altar" (Hanlon 1988). Titles serve to connect people back to their cosmological roots, the explanation of their origins (Bernart 1977, Fischer *et al.* 1977), and their ontological situation in the social and temporal world (Petersen 1982a).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> These chiefs often have several titles, of historical significance, providing sacred authority investing the office with various mandates having deep ties to Pohnpei and its ancestral past.

<sup>21</sup> A review of the all the titles, their specific names and meanings is beyond the scope of this work. Riesenbergs (1968:8-14) provides the most comprehensive listing available. He also lists the section chief and executive chief

In addition to these deep meanings, titles have very practical applications and implications. Virtually everyone in Pohnpei has a title, and certainly every responsible man possesses one (or it possesses – and, to an extent, defines – him). Indeed, one cannot even be addressed within the traditional Pohnpeian feasthouse by one's common name. One must have a title to even be recognized within this crucial social sphere. The Kansas City section features the same section chief and cup-bearing chief lines as any section on Pohnpei. Each of these manifests dozens of titles running down in ranked succession. These rankings can be somewhat fluid based on the prestige that an individual brings to the title through his actions and alliances but the higher titles are fairly well set. There are a number of men who have been awarded the same title in the Kansas City section as they held in their sections in Pohnpei.

Individuals are frequently known by their titles in daily interaction, particularly when the title is of importance to them or if others around them deem it to be of significance. There are several men who are known by titles which they no longer actually hold due to their departure from Pohnpei and associated title forfeiture. Title becomes conflated with individual identity, much as names with places (Basso 1988) but titles are more than that. In Pohnpei titles are mechanisms to situate people within social space. Rank identifies person. It is a handle by which one can be got hold of – by those structurally above and below. For instance, the section chief can be called upon by both those ideally under him for assistance and by those over him for production. This puts one in the structural position to be required to perform social obligations at the peril of losing one's title which approximates one's place in society, and even personal identity.

Each title has a history. It is tied to its literal and historical meaning, to prior title-holders, particularly relatives who held the same title before. Some titles have significance which

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titles of the two section line divisions of dozens of sections in Pohnpei (Riesenberg 1968:21-28) but does not address the dozens of other titles running in succession beneath these chiefs.

translates fairly well island-wide, which is to say regardless of the tribal district or section in which the title and its holder appears.<sup>22</sup> The relative intelligibility of sociopolitical rank and titles among Pohnpeians is part of what led our founders to pursue the deployment of section organization in Kansas City.

### ***Perceptions of the Kansas City Section***

Perceptions of this novel sociopolitical formation vary between founders and older section members, younger section members, and outside observers. For the two initial categories mentioned, the section serves as a mechanism to reproduce Pohnpeian culture, organize local activities, provide identity and structure through titles, and facilitate transition of Pohnpeians in Kansas City back to Pohnpei by keeping them steeped in Pohnpeian culture, language, and practice. Younger Pohnpeians appreciate the sociality and especially the dancing both by participation and observation. However, the degree to which enjoying the sociality that section participation provides translates to the strong commitment required to be displayed through full participation in section activities by young adults and adults is presently indeterminate. Some young adults view the section with skepticism, noting that the extraction of money from Kansas City section members by section feasts has shadings of “genius” implying self-serving ingenuity by chiefs. Others even go so far as to characterize it as a “scam” to extract money from workers.

The conversations from which these characterizations of “genius” and “scam” were extracted were otherwise conducted entirely in Pohnpeian, but these words were uttered in English and are here noted verbatim. The self-critical aspect of these comments is of no surprise to those experienced with Pohnpeians (Petersen 1982a, 1985:20,31), nor is it a shock that these two people enthusiastically participate in the section activities while retaining a critical distance on

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<sup>22</sup> This is not to suggest that individuals are merely playing roles in which the titles are preeminent and persons function as interchangeable parts for the players in a social drama, *a la* Geertz’s (1973) characterization of the Balinese.

its workings. Custom and the disparate economic interests of participants in the chieftainship system are available for criticism (ibid). But the negative connotation expressed by the use of these English words is more extreme than what I have otherwise heard. It may be that this is a linguistic function whereby pejorative sentiments are more readily expressed in another language or euphemistically characterized as another (e.g. pardon my French). It could also be that with more exposure to American culture, the American *ideal* of equality has seeped into their consciousnesses, causing them to take an even more critical view of chieftainship and the section system. A fuller exploration of this issue is beyond the scope of the present analysis of the Kansas City section.

### ***Views from Elsewhere***

Residence in Kansas City, while a generally a prerequisite to, does not guarantee Kansas City section membership. There is an aspect of voluntarism to participation. Less than half of the four to five hundred Pohnpeian residents in Kansas City participate in the section. Why do they not engage? While all Pohnpeians can establish at least a distant consanguinal or affinal link to one another, close kin or immediate affinal ties are predictably stronger. The Kansas City section is comprised primarily, but certainly not exclusively, of the current section chief's family and their close kin and affinal relations. The area of Wene in the tribal district of Kiti in Pohnpei is home for many of them. Their intermarriages extend primarily to the tribal districts of Madolenihmw and U, with some ties to Net and Sokehs. The respective ranking of the influence of the five tribes in the Kansas City section can be seen most clearly in the fact that both of the section chiefs have been from Wene (in Kiti) and the cup-bearing chief is from U. Those section members from the other tribal districts also have titles (some of them high-ranking), but not of

the number and magnitude of the section and cup-bearing chief titles. This is not to suggest that consanguinal or affinal ties are required for section membership; they are simply the norm.

Pohnpeians in Kansas City seem to cluster around preexisting kin relationships – both in residence patterns and in work. This is pertinent to the Kansas City section because there is a density of former Madolenihmw and Sokehs residents working in one of the premier employers (one Japanese steakhouse) as compared to another major employer (of the same stripe). The second location mentioned includes near-unanimous section membership and participation – these people are almost all from Kiti and U or have affinal ties to these tribal districts. The non-section members often studiously ignore discussions relating to section activities.<sup>23</sup> Direct questions on the subject of their involvement with the section are generally met with equivocation. Rarely such an inquiry will elicit a telling response expressing a derisive attitude towards the section, such as they are flaunting conventions or even destroying custom by one practice or another within the Kansas City section activities or structure.

While many Kansas City section members are from the Madolenihmw tribal district, their tie to the section is most often affinal rather than consanguinal. Members of the Madolenihmw tribe are numerous in Kansas City and, lacking affinal ties to the section, are least likely to affiliate with it. The concentration of Madolenihmw and Sokehs tribe members at the aforementioned Japanese steakhouse comes with a paucity of Kansas City section members. There are a few exceptions to this, but not many. Despite its broad membership as measured by tribal affiliation, the Kansas City section is officially a Kiti section. Tribute inures to Kiti chiefs and productive efforts of section members are recognized by Kiti chiefs. Thus, someone with a strong Madolenihmw tribal district identity (and lacking affinal ties to Kiti) could be wasting his or her

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<sup>23</sup> Note, the north/south distinction is made within the section membership.

time and energy by building up the Kansas City section, and could be working to enrich their traditional rival tribe.

Progression on (or expulsion from) tribal districts' paths of titles is a principal driving force behind the incipient formation of another, separate, section tied strictly to tribal membership.<sup>24</sup> It is not mere happenstance that the emergent section is a vassal of the Madolenihmw tribal district. While it is in its infancy and is not localized in a geographic area as the Kansas City section is, it stands already in competition with the established Kansas City section in some ways. This was manifest by its fielding of its own dancers at the recent Micronesian Women's Day event as one opponent to the Kansas City section's group of dancers hosted by Pohnpeians in Kansas City. It sponsored teams that competed in the baseball tournament as well. The traditional tribal district rivalry between Kiti and Madolenihmw is alive and well, even in Kansas City.<sup>25</sup>

A critical question for which there is no definitive answer at present is how Kansas City section membership is viewed by Pohnpeians living on Pohnpei. Is it marginalized or given equal weight to the average Pohnpeian section of Pohnpei proper? Is it regarded as breaking with tradition or as a valid application of the sociopolitical system? One clue that it is both accorded respect and acceptance that Pohnpeians in Kansas City provide is that the current section chief of Kansas City resides in Pohnpei, attends tribal district council meetings, and receives the requisite stipend for meeting attendance by Kiti section chiefs. So, at least in Kiti, some recognition is given to the Kansas City section's legitimacy. The salience of this point may be mitigated by the fact that the paramount chief who organized the Kansas City section is

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<sup>24</sup> These developments are ramifications of dwelling in displacement, as James Clifford (1994:310) has termed this general condition.

<sup>25</sup> The five tribal districts have a fascinating history, one that has been explored by others (Hanlon 1988, for instance). It appears that Madolenihmw (especially Temwen) and Kiti (particularly Wene) have uniquely deep and often antagonistic historical relationships. The other tribal districts play into this narrative, often crucially, but the depth of their histories does not seem to be quite what Madolenihmw and Kiti feature, particularly not the consistent oppositional nature.



in a position to strongly influence this recognition within his own tribal district on Pohnpei. The legitimacy of the Kansas City section in the minds of Pohnpeians on Pohnpei is further supported by the fact that the incipient section is not one under the authority of Kiti but rather of the neighboring and traditionally rival tribal district of Madolenihmw.

### ***Initial Analysis of the Kansas City Section***

David Hanlon (2004:203) discusses the perspective of the people of Wene's settlement of that area of Pohnpei, which is apropos the Pohnpeian settlement of Kansas City.

The earliest accounts of Pohnpei's past speak of the difficulties of settling the new land. Establishing oneself on the island was as challenging as it was promising. [...] Among the more general themes prevalent in these foundational histories, however, are stories of want, struggle, experimentation, improvisation, discovery, divine assistance, clan wars, encounters with malevolent spirits, and a general search for order. Beyond questions surrounding the literal accuracy of these accounts, *there emerges a story of different peoples endeavoring to find a place for themselves in a new land and amid other established or newly arriving groups. Order there would eventually be. Wone's histories speak of the rise of a chiefly culture...* (emphasis added).<sup>26</sup>

This provides a historical touchstone for Pohnpeians displaced from their homeland, particularly those of Wene heritage. The rise of the "chiefly culture" was coincident with successful community establishment of the Wene peoples in Pohnpei. Amid similar factors of competitive groups and hostile forces as we find in the contemporary United States, chiefly power brought order and success to Pohnpeians in the past.

The Kansas City section is a creative extension of the paramount chief's *manaman* to an area outside of his traditional lands, but working through his people.<sup>27</sup> Connections between people and land have been touched upon throughout and will be discussed again in this paper. The economic benefits to the paramount chief, as well as for the section chief and cup-bearing chief, are obvious. This may have factored into the decision to organize Kansas City as a section. This

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<sup>26</sup> Hanlon favors the Wone spelling, reflective of the distinctive local pronunciation. Throughout this essay, I use the more common Wene configuration.

<sup>27</sup> *Manaman* is the cognate of the familiar *mana* with the same implications.

has a relevant historical Pohnpeian precedent that will be discussed later in this essay. The section activities, particularly the feasts, provide a nexus for expressing in traditional forms the relationships that in some ways preexisted the official section organization in Kansas City. The assignment of titles provides the coeval structure, reflecting and expressing hierarchical rankings, binding the people to the section and to Pohnpei via the tribal district of Kiti, particularly to the area of Wene – the place many Kansas City section members ultimately consider to be their home.

Despite the Kansas City section's direct tie to the tribal district of Kiti, several section members characterize it as a Pohnpeian section, rather than a Kiti section. This is intriguing for a number of reasons. First, the Kansas City area is not inherently Pohnpeian at all in terms of geographic location or political affiliation. But neither is it inherently United States or even Native American territory. Second, sections can only exist under the authority of a paramount tribal chief within the related district boundaries. Third, by transcending existing tribal affiliations, the Kansas City section takes on aspects of a tribal district. Fourth, vis-à-vis its relative importance in the geographic space of the United States to other communities of Pohnpeians, it functions more like a capital section of a district in Pohnpei (Riesenberg 1968:68). And fifth, in a broader conceptual scheme it functions like a diasporic capital (Butler 2001:211).

As Pohnpeians spread throughout the world, they repeat the process of the colonization of Pohnpei itself (Bernart 1977, Hanlon 1988, Hanlon 2004). Pohnpeian historian Luelen Bernart chronicles the seven legendary voyages that led to Pohnpei becoming populated. He recounts that people came from elsewhere to colonize Pohnpei in multiple waves and with not infrequent returns to their previous homes (Bernart 1977, Hanlon 1988). Movement is characteristic of humans generally (Marshall 2004), and Micronesians in particular (Bautista 2010). Pohnpeians

were notoriously hard to pin down to place or property (Sturges, in Hanlon 1988:127) and migration outside of the island was facilitated by networks of matrilineal kin throughout Micronesia historically (Petersen 2009) and now the world (Hanlon 1998, Marshall 2004, Allen 1997, Burton *et al.* 2001, Bautista 2011). Pohnpeians are less defined as Pohnpeian by the locations they inhabit than they are by the sense of locality that they produce as communities of Pohnpeians inhabiting geographic spaces which become Pohnpeian places. This is particularly the case when sociopolitical organization is involved with Pohnpeian activities. The next chapter addresses how Pohnpeians came to inhabit the geographic space of Kansas City.

## **V: Linking Pohnpei to Kansas City**

*Those of us who like our development quantifiable and our heroes clearly identifiable, rooted in place and time...may find it difficult to keep up with the movement of people and the changing character of life in Micronesia. We may need to develop a greater sense of nuance and subtlety that admits to both the polyvocality and polylocality of the Micronesian diaspora to other areas of the Pacific and the world. – David Hanlon 1998:239*

### ***Location in the Physical World, the Imagination, and Social Space***

In many respects this study is about location – location on maps and in minds, location in the physical world and in imagined communities, and production of locality, construction of place by a community of people (Rodman 1992:640-641). Anthropologists are trained to be aware of a certain arbitrariness in human life, particularly as it pertains to categories, associations, and organization. Arbitrariness does not imply lack of order or intelligible history, but rather recognition that the aspects of the world that confront us are not foreordained and forever fixed. But life and its various aspects (institutions, cultures, traditions, categories of interpretation) appear as being really real. This is because, in part, they are imagined to be so. The real and the imagined are in a constant spiral of mutual production for humans and the phenomena under study here are no different.

Castoriadis (1975:8) explains that what is typically conceived of as reality (“that we identify as our world”) is produced by the system of meanings based upon the imaginary, “an incessant and essentially determined creation (sociohistorical and psychic) of figures, forms/images [...] [that] refers both to the product of imagination (our worlds made up of systems of meanings) and to the activity, the ability by which we create a system of meaning....” (in Hannoum 2003:62-63). Hannoum’s conception seems to be congruent with, though not precisely the same as, this notion of the spiraling production of what we identify as our world mentioned here as he goes on to note that: “The imaginary is a function of producing meanings, and it is the product of this

function” (Hannoum 2003:63). The concept of the imaginary and imagination used herein follows Hannoum’s position that “the imaginary does not create *ex nihilo*, but rather operates within systems of meanings, transforming them in such a way as to create new meanings out of old ones” (ibid). Thus imagination in this sense is not fictitious but is rather based on the ability to make connections to bestow meanings on a world that is opaque but that we make sense of nonetheless. These concepts will be taken up again in Chapter IX but they apply directly to the discussion at hand.

This study is about a people and how they organize their society as it extends to new (to them) locations and circumstances, and how they in turn create unique places from this concatenation. These particular people are physically located in the Kansas City metropolitan area but have migrated from the island of Pohnpei and imaginatively locate themselves in relation to Pohnpei. The society they produce in Kansas City is influenced by their physical and imagined location with reference to their home island. As has been explained, this community of about four or five hundred people features a form of the traditional Pohnpeian chiefly hierarchy organized under the authority of a traditional paramount chief living on Pohnpei but directly influencing lives in Kansas City through an organized section in Kansas City.<sup>28</sup> Community members indicate that this is unique to Kansas City; no other group of Pohnpeians living outside of Pohnpei is organized in this fashion – as an otherwise traditional section of a Pohnpeian district, but located in a geographical area outside of the island Pohnpei.<sup>29</sup> This situation has provided an opportunity to study what happens to a traditional form of political, social, and ceremonial organization when it takes shape in a very different environment.

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<sup>28</sup> Hezel (2001:150) estimates the population of Pohnpeians in Kansas City to be about three hundred. I have heard estimates as high as six hundred as of 2013.

<sup>29</sup> The incipient Madolenihmw section’s principal organizer has indicated that it does *not* have the same territorial focus that the Kansas City section presents. In fact, it is specifically *de*-territorialized, bound not by space, but by tribal heritage.

Several key points are recapitulated here. Glenn Petersen (1982a) observes that the Pohnpeian section system lies at the heart of Pohnpeian social life and the perpetuation of their culture. The Pohnpeian term for section (*kousapw*) means land built-up and implies that this is for productive use by people. Sections are organized under the principles of matrilineal descent, seniority in several aspects, and traditional authority crystalized in the concept of mana or *manaman* derived from ancestors and the paramount chief of the tribal district in which the section is located (Petersen 1999). The section mimics the district in its primary governing order; there are two lines of chiefs characterized broadly as sacred and secular or paramount and executive. The paramount chief of a district chooses a section chief from among a group of candidates with varying degrees of ascription in clan and lineage membership, seniority within these divisions, and age, as well as achievement largely demonstrated by participation in section feasts. The section chief then selects the section's executive chief and frequently dozens of lesser chiefs in each of the section's two chiefly lines. This is done to create or solidify alliances of the various lineages within the section and to reward high achievers for their efforts that benefit the community as a collective (Petersen 1982a). This is particularly manifest in their performance at section feasts and through long-term commitment and service to the community and its members.

The central questions explored in this portion of the analysis are: what happens to the traditional Pohnpeian section system when it is transposed in Kansas City and how does the Kansas City section influence the experience of place in the contexts it generates in the Pohnpeian community in Kansas City?

## ***What...Are They Doing HERE?***

### *The Regional and Global Context*

How do Pohnpeians get from Pohnpei to Kansas City and why do they come here at all? The relative geographical locations seem so disparate with no readily apparent connection (Rodman 1992:645). We will start by locating Pohnpei. David Hanlon reports that during the 1970's, t-shirts began being printed asking the question, "Where the hell is Ponape?" (Hanlon 2009:91) The same query appeared for other islands in the region known as Micronesia causing Hanlon to broaden the interrogation of physical and imagined location to: "Where, and what, the hell is Micronesia?" (ibid) This question will be briefly explored below to help more fully situate and locate the subject matter at hand.

Micronesia is one of three areas of Oceania defined by French explorer and naval officer, Dumont D'Urville, in the 1820's – Melanesia and Polynesia being the other two (Kirch 2002:4). Pohnpei is one of four states in the Federated States of Micronesia (hereafter, FSM) located generally just north of the equatorial Pacific. The most populous of these states is Chuuk, with Yap and Kosrae joining Pohnpei to round out the foursome. Pohnpei is the second most populous and arguably, historically the most prestigious and influential member of the group (Goodenough 1986, Petersen 2006a). Micronesia as an area in D'Urville's scheme also includes island groups such as Palau, The Northern Marianas, The Marshall Islands, and Kiribati. The islands feature various political affiliations but generally with the United States.

For this study to be fully situated an exposition of Pohnpei in the global context would be ideal (Wolf 1982:3-4). This context needs to be glossed at present, beginning with a brief note that Pohnpei has had successive colonial powers directly involved in its internal affairs since the 1880's, beginning with Spain, succeeded by Germany, Japan, and The United States (Petersen

1984b:349-350). American involvement in Pohnpei goes back further as the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) of Boston, Massachusetts (a Protestant Christian sect) established missions there as early as 1852 (Hanlon 1998:90). Catholicism became a force in Pohnpei with the Spanish occupation in the 1880's. Each colonial power and religion left its mark on Pohnpei in different ways. The German land reform has repercussions to this day (Bascom 1948:212, Hanlon 1998:176, Petersen 1979:28; 1982a:5) through the removal of land ownership from the chiefs. Additionally, the impact of trade dating to the early 1800's (mainly, but certainly not exclusively, American) persists, particularly in its modification of the indigenous prestige economy (Bascom 1948:213, Petersen 1986:84) and the resulting experience of daily life.

#### *Economic Blackbirding and Pacific Islanders*

*Jobs in Pohnpei don't pay us enough. It's barely enough to buy what we need. If I make \$2.00 per day, it's just enough to buy a bag of rice, some chicken, and some soy sauce. And maybe every now and then I can buy some electricity. So I had to move to America where work pays more just so I can live.* – First-generation Pohnpeian resident of Kansas City

The American Trusteeship was established following World War II. It was succeeded by the Compact of Free Association (Petersen 1985:14, Hanlon 1998:222, Hanlon 2009:100-101) which has irrevocably altered the way the Pohnpeians interact economically internally and with the outside world.<sup>30</sup> The fusion of first trade goods and then the money economy with Pohnpei's traditional prestige economy generated a Pohnpeian "need" for imported manufactured goods and cash. This, in combination with the Compact of Free Association (the Compact), granted reciprocal open access to the markets of global capitalism (Hanlon 1998:239, Marshall 2004:22) and resulted in "economic blackbirding" as it is characterized in this paper. Pacific Islanders and others have a similar experience with global capitalism (Wolf 1982:361, Marshall 2004:90-93,

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<sup>30</sup> The inside/outside distinction between Pohnpei and the world is more blurry than it ever was – and it never was clear. "No Island is an Island" (Marshall 2004:133).



Small 2011:6-8). The term economic blackbirding is used here simply to crystallize the relationship between Pacific Islanders and the Western (now global) market. Island labor is effectively conscripted (as it was historically by “blackbirding”), or otherwise manipulated, into deployment and exploitation by hegemonic economic powers (Hezel 1983:233, Chappell 1992:142).

Global capitalism, specifically American, draws Pohnpeian laborers into the capitalist labor force. The perceived need for manufactured goods has subjugated the Pohnpeian people to the global market. Workers leave home to pursue better paying jobs than are available on Pohnpei. This deepens the Pohnpeian immersion in the market economy, particularly those who migrate in search of work, generally to the United States and its territories. The need for manufactured goods is characterized as perceived because Pohnpeians still have sufficient land, water, food, and other natural resources to exist as their not-too-distant ancestors did. This does not appear to be a viable option, however, in the minds of Pohnpeians. They believe they need electricity, processed foods, manufactured goods, and modern conveniences. Hence, they do need them, actively pursue their acquisition, and structure their lives accordingly. This notion is supported by the quotation at the outset of this section which is representative of a common narrative related to me by a dozen different Pohnpeians in Kansas City from various occupations and age groups. This constructed need has been noted by others as well (e.g. Hanlon 1998).

This is the overall context and mechanism through which the Pohnpeians living in Kansas City came to be where they are – via their connection to the global political and economic community, particularly in connection with the unique brand of American colonialism. While Pohnpeians possess a keen understanding of the external causes of their migration, this is not what they focus on in their day-to-day lives. Indeed, they view the access to the wider world that

the Compact has opened to them as an opportunity and it directly impacts the way their community life plays out in Kansas City.

The more dominant narrative of Pohnpeians present in Kansas City is one of individual but more so of kinship and family considerations. These concerns they hold in common with migrants generally but particularly with Pacific Islanders including Samoans, Tongans, Chuukese, Marshallese (Kallen 1982, Small 2011, Marshall 2004, Burton *et al.* 2001).<sup>31</sup> Reasons for migration include access to education, jobs, and freedom (Shimizu 1996, Marshall 2004, Burton *et al.* 2001, Small 2011). Mac Marshall characterizes these motivations as the “Four E’s:” education, employment, entertainment, and excitement (Marshall 2004:34). Pursuit of the Four E’s allows Pohnpeians living in Kansas City to have access to the money economy and the prestige it provides along with the ability to provide for family members living at home on Pohnpei who do not have the wherewithal to interface with the global market. Limited English language skills and traditional responsibilities keep many others tethered to Pohnpei, restricting migration. The drive to provide for kin appears to be pervasive to Pohnpeians and is common to Pacific Islanders (Petersen 1979:35-36, Kallen 1982:121, Schulte 2012), and no doubt to many others (for example, De Genova 2005).

### *Destination Pohnpei*

Numerous studies of displaced communities of Pacific Islanders and specifically Micronesians have been undertaken over the years. Some of these communities were displaced directly by economic or military despoilment, including nuclear testing (Silverman 1971, Kiste 1974 [in Petersen 1979], Tate and Hull 1964, Tobin 1967). Others were displaced indirectly by economic blackbirding leading to displaced communities. These communities are often analyzed

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<sup>31</sup> I largely follow Nicholas de Genova’s (2005:2) use of migrant in favor of immigrant to reflect the more open status of movement of people, and to respect the Kansas City Pohnpeians’ general self-representation of temporary dwelling (versus permanent immigration) in Kansas City.

through the MIRAB (Migration, Remittances, Aid, and Bureaucracy) model.<sup>32</sup> A review of the literature did not reveal a study of displaced Pohnpeian communities which is not surprising. Historically and prehistorically Pohnpei was a place people moved *to*, not one people moved *from* (Riesenberg 1968:6, 20). Indeed, a common response to this subject of Pohnpeian migration to Kansas City from professors and fellow graduate students is, “What the hell are they doing *here*?” This response is conditioned by the Western perception of Pacific Islands as “paradise” (Marshall 2004:143-144) but it is one shared by Pohnpeians.

Only one of dozens of first-generation Pohnpeian migrants who opined on the subject was ambivalent about returning to Pohnpei to live. The rest look forward with great anticipation to return visits and hold a hope of permanent return. Indeed, in its population analyses the FSM considers return migration “likely” (FSM 2010:3). The term Pohnpeians use to describe their tenure in Kansas City, even in speeches at Kansas City section feasts, means “to stay temporarily.” This is consistent with intentions of the founders of the section as part of their motivation to advocate for section organization in Kansas City was to facilitate cultural competence for section members so they could easily assimilate to Pohnpeian life upon their expected return to Pohnpei.

In prehistorical times, so common was immigration to Pohnpei, that the current district of Sokehs was known as Pwapwalik which means “language of foreigners” (Hanlon 1988:13, Petersen 2009:175, 227). Sokehs, Net, and Kolonia (the latter two were previously a part of Sokehs) retain this distinction of being home to significant communities of outsiders who have come to call Pohnpei home. This includes Kiribatians, Pinglapese, Mokilese, Ngatikese, Mortlockese, Kapingamarangi, and others. Pohnpei’s central location in Micronesia, agricultural

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<sup>32</sup> (See Burton, et al. 2001, Ahlburg and Yong Nam 2006, Bertram 2006, Fraenkel 2006, Friberg, et al. 2006, Ware 2005.)

developments, and cultural dynamism made it a center of influence with a magnetic attraction for the region's population historically (Petersen 2006a:89). The force, flexibility, and persistence of Pohnpeian culture (*tiahk en sapw*) managed to incorporate prehistoric waves of immigrants and their ways into the socio-political, economic, and cultural system that largely persists (Hanlon 1988:198). For Pohnpeians migration is a fact of life. Assimilation is something that people readily take to and it is something to be counteracted when Pohnpeians themselves migrate.

### ***Pohnpeian Tradition – Adaptation, Incorporation, and Modification***

#### ***The Perspective of the People***

Pohnpeians are proud of their heritage. Among their other achievements, their ancestors constructed the extensive network of 92 artificial islets with megalithic basalt structures known as Nan Madol referred to as the Venice of the Pacific (Kirch 2002:1). This complex covers an area larger than that of the pyramids of Giza.

Pohnpeians expelled the Spanish colonialists from Pohnpei and only finally submitted to modern foreign domination when the Germans disposed of the chiefs of Sokehs by death or deportation following an uprising during which the German governor of Pohnpei was killed (Gorenflo 1992:6, Petersen 2007:318-319).<sup>33</sup> More recently Pohnpei was the only one of the four members of the FSM to vote “no” in the plebiscite regarding extending the relationship with the United States via the Compact of Free Association (Petersen 1985:13-14, Hanlon 1988:207). All other Micronesian nations other than Kiribati have some sort of “voluntary” affiliation with the United States. Pohnpei alone voted for outright independence for its island polity. In a sense

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<sup>33</sup> This apparent lack of resistance to dominant intrusion is only in the form of armed, physical resistance. The Pohnpeian trait of *kanengamah* (Petersen 1993) provides another form of resistance. Further, there is a history of stranger-kings noted in Pohnpei by both Hanlon and Petersen that begs to be explored in more detail, possibly as it pertains to the dynamic of Pohnpeian interaction with imperialist powers in the modern context.

this marks Pohnpei as the only Micronesian island that is in a relation of subordination with another nation at least to some degree against its will. By prior agreement the majority vote of the four members of what would become the FSM bound Pohnpei to the will of the others.

The larger point here is that Pohnpeian attitudes toward where they belong in the world run deep. Indeed, Pohnpei's "real name" is *Pohnpei Sarawi*, "sacred Pohnpei" or, more literally, "on the holy altar" (Hanlon 1988:6). Pohnpeians hail from hallowed ground and the manner in which they order their world remains for most rooted in tradition (*tiahk en sapw*, the custom of the land), structured by their traditional hierarchies, and tied to land with historical meaning and value (Hanlon 1988:6-7, Petersen 1982a:27). However, Pohnpeians have been and remain a pragmatic people, adjusting to the world around them and incorporating what they find useful (Hanlon 1988:25,206). This includes outsiders as individual people, their things, and their ways (Hanlon 1988:165,198-199).

Related to this point of pragmatism and incorporation of others and their ways, the answer to the question, "What...are they doing here?" has largely been answered in a general fashion by other studies (Marshall's "Four E's"). And while the personal narratives of Pohnpeians in Kansas City are intriguing, inspiring, and sometimes heart-wrenching, the end result from an external perspective is that their reasons fall largely within the categories discussed, namely, education, economics, and kinship commitments (Marshall 2004:34). Despite (or, arguably because of) their commitment to tradition, Pohnpeians willingly and creatively adapt that tradition to the world around them and the forces that impinge upon them (Hanlon 1988, Petersen 2009).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> For general discussions of this process, see Bateson (1935), Hanson (1989), Sahlins (1999), and Clifford (2001), some of which will be touched upon later in this essay.

While Pohnpeians are perfectly capable of adapting as individuals, the community orientation of Pohnpeian life centralizes social structure around the institution of chieftainship (Petersen 1982a, Hanlon 2004). The chiefs are the primary but certainly not exclusive actors determining how new phenomena and dynamics are dealt with by Pohnpeians. This is not to assume that the dictates of a chief are taken wholesale and executed without change or question (Petersen 1993), simply that Pohnpeians often look to their chiefs for guidance and confirmation in such situations (Hanlon 1988, Bernart 1977).

### *The View from Above*

From the chiefs' (*Soupeidi* or, "those who face down") perspective from Pohnpei, the development of communities of Pohnpeians in foreign lands presents a dilemma. As has been mentioned, Pohnpeians are accustomed to migration and have dealt with it throughout their history. However, that migration has almost always been in, not out – and those who do leave Pohnpei eventually return. So they are confronting a new historical event, a rupture in Pohnpeian experience, a phenomenon to be addressed. While Pohnpeians reside on Pohnpei the social pressure to participate in some form in section activities is palpable. Many of these activities benefit not just the immediate community but also the paramount chiefs. Away from Pohnpei with less social pressure and, other than in Kansas City, no traditional section by which to render tribute to the paramount chiefs, people keep the fruits of their labors, with no tribute paid.<sup>35</sup>

While the advent of massive out-migration appears to be new to Pohnpeians and presents a challenge to the extension of chiefly power, chiefs have adapted to new social forces before. Of particular relevance are Western economic forces that utilized Pohnpeian labor. The historical

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<sup>35</sup> As has been noted, the incipient community mentioned above has not yet fully taken shape, and, to my knowledge, tribute has not yet been paid to the paramount on Pohnpei from this section.

analogy drawn here is that during trading with the whale ships in the early to middle 1800's Pohnpeian common women, often at the urging of male relatives, began to consort with the sailors on ships at harbor. The euphemism that developed for this activity was that the women were "getting their clothes" (Hanlon 1988:131) through their earnings. Because this activity took place off of Pohnpei in the 1840's (Chappell 1992:135) and separate from the traditional prestige economy this labor fell outside of the domain of the chiefs' ability extract tribute (Hanlon 1988:99).<sup>36</sup> Ostensibly under the pressure of his missionary allies/friends/patrons the Nahnken Nahnku of Kiti later officially banned such activities in his district for a time by restricting women from going to the ships. The underlying interaction persisted in brothels, which operated onshore, allowing for the possibility of tribute from the beachcomber operators to the chiefs (Hanlon 1988:99).<sup>37</sup>

By organizing the Kansas City area as a section of Pohnpei the Nahnmwarki (also of Kiti – there may be a connection to the ingenuity displayed by Nahnken Nahnku of Kiti historically) has managed to harness the fruits of labors conducted offshore that would otherwise not fall within his purview. Rather than moving the productive activities onshore as the Nahnken of old did, our present paramount extended Pohnpeian sociopolitical organization offshore to the locus of activities – Kansas City. The exploitation of women historically by the foreigners and male kin also parallels, under the economic blackbirding rubric, the exploitation of Pohnpeian labor by foreigners (their American employers) and kin living in Pohnpei (via remittances). As with the

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<sup>36</sup> Because this took place in Pohnpeian harbors, the chiefs' initial position (Hanlon 1988) was that the ships themselves, and all of their cargo, were Pohnpeian property. This was predictably disputed by the traders. The chiefs seem to have reluctantly assented to the traders' position. I believe that this may have been an acceptable compromise because the reef and harbors represent liminal areas – not land, but not open ocean – so the chiefs' absolute authority was not negatively impacted on Pohnpei proper.

<sup>37</sup> While Hanlon does not state that tribute was rendered, by moving the activity from offshore (onboard foreign vessels) to onshore (clearly the Nahnken's territory), Nahnken Nahnku brought the activity clearly within his domain; I conclude that it is implausible that some form of tribute did not inure (at least indirectly) to the chiefs.

historical analogy, there is a clear mutual benefit to the activities (unsavory as some may find them) and Pohnpeians exercise agency within the world system as they intersect with it to get what they want from it. Pohnpeian commoners utilize opportunities to make a living and provide for their families and draw satisfaction and meaning from their activities; ranking Pohnpeians benefit from this arrangement in a more passive manner in the form of tribute. Chiefs of the past ingeniously found a way to benefit from the historical activity that seemed to fall outside of their provenance by bringing it onshore, back within the sociopolitical system. Modern chiefs developed a way to harness the fruits of the labors of Pohnpeians not living on Pohnpei by extending a longstanding and legitimate indigenous institution (section organization) offshore.

#### *A Pohnpeian Chieftaindom in Kansas City?*

*As long as external conditions do not drive Pohnpeians from their land, their communities and community organization – the institution of chieftainship – seem destined to survive. – Glenn Petersen 1982a:126*

The question “What...are they doing here?” is followed by, “What is being here doing to Pohnpeian customs?” How the sociopolitical system is impacted by its deployment in the Kansas City community is a particular focus. This development is really quite remarkable from a number of perspectives. We have an ostensibly and erstwhile land-based Pohnpeian tribal sociopolitical formation cropping up in the center of the nation-state of the United States of America. It appears here as a labor-based, trans-tribal, trans-national (or extra-national) formation but it is still granted legitimacy by traditional Pohnpeian sociopolitical institutions and cultural norms. It gives migrant Pohnpeian workers a direct link to their home island via a traditional institution.

The issue of the impact of migration, and circular migration, on Pacific Island cultures has been explored by others who note the tendency of Micronesians and other Pacific Islanders to form groups starting with isolates, clusters, and communities, with various levels of organization



and political or traditional recognition from the home island.<sup>38</sup> The community of Pohnpeians in Kansas City displays a specific feature that is of particular interest, distinct from the forms of organization found in other displaced communities of Pacific Islanders. As has been noted, despite the community being physically located in Kansas City, it has been constituted as a Pohnpeian section under the authority (*manaman*) of a traditional paramount chief of Kiti, one of the five districts (*wehi* or tribes) of Pohnpei's traditional political system.

According to the most detailed and recent study of Pohnpeian section-level organization, Glenn Petersen (1982a) concluded that Pohnpei's political and land tenure system and community organization are sufficiently robust, even with major changes to its political economy since Western contact, to survive "as long as external conditions do not drive Ponapeans from their land" (1982a:126). This assertion begs a number of questions given the situation of the Pohnpeian community in Kansas City. The Kansas City section has taken hold in a location where Pohnpeians have been displaced from their land.<sup>39</sup> David Hanlon (1998:239) notes that migration is increasingly common among Micronesians. He concludes that this makes the traditional perceptions of rootedness in place increasingly rare in practice and we should be cognizant of the changes that result. To further expand the general question noted above: is the traditional Pohnpeian section system durable enough to maintain its efficacy even if Pohnpeians are displaced from their land (whether by external conditions or internal ambitions)? Does it atrophy into decay? Is it replicated unchanged? Does it survive but in modified form? What are its features, and how do they compare to the system in Pohnpei itself?

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<sup>38</sup> See Small (2011), Marshall (2004), Bautista (2011), Kallen (1982), and Burton *et al.* (2001). Burton *et al.* note an "official" recognition of the Orange County Marshallese by the Marshallese government, as does Schulte (2012) in Springdale, Arkansas, and Kallen reveals, through a study by Pitt and Macpherson (1974), that Samoan chiefs of specific lineages were appointed in New Zealand.

<sup>39</sup> In fact, the vast majority of Pohnpeians in Kansas City rent apartments, condos, or houses, though a number of them do own homes, but, to my knowledge, none of them have "land" as we would generally interpret it – acreage with the potential for food crops.

In order to productively explore these questions, a situation that allows observation of Pohnpeian communities, community organization, and the institution of chieftainship in a milieu that features Pohnpeians displaced from their land is required. As has been discussed at length above, just such a place exists in the community of Pohnpeians in the Kansas City metropolitan area. Accordingly the questions that such a change in the fundamental assumption of Petersen's assertion led to are answered. This analysis is intended to supplement the existing record, as studies of displaced Micronesian communities have focused on groups lacking the traditional political organization found in the Kansas City section. This is also an account of some of the aspects of life encountered by Pohnpeians dwelling in displacement (Clifford 1994:310).

In the preceding chapters, these experiences were viewed through the lens of Pohnpei-specific considerations and the phenomena related back to Pohnpeian sociopolitical formations and traditions. More general conceptions, such as diaspora, displaced communities, invention of tradition, as well as conceptions of locality and place have been touched upon. In the succeeding chapters, an exposition of these concepts will become the focus in order to help situate this study in the context of these conceptual categories. They will be developed with reference to the social scientific literature but with reference to Micronesia, especially Pohnpei, and the Pohnpeian community in Kansas City. This effort begins with a category within which it seems natural to situate the Pohnpeian community in Kansas City – displaced communities. This category will be slightly realigned to provide a distinction between types of displaced communities that will be brought to bear on the Kansas City community of Pohnpeians. This will be followed by an exploration of concepts of locality, place, and tradition, as well as their interrelationships.

## VI: The Kansas City Section as a Displaced Community

*[T]he Kansas City section is a Pohnpeian section. People from all the different tribes are members of our section. It doesn't matter which tribe you're from for us. In Pohnpei, it doesn't work like that. Almost everybody belongs to the section of their tribe. So that's why I say this is a Pohnpeian section not a Kiti section or even a Kansas City section. – Pohnpeian resident of Kansas City and active section member*

### ***Displacement: Relocation, Migration, and Diaspora***

Attempts to situate this study in the literature led to the general category of displaced Micronesian communities. Early work in this area centers on communities relocated due to nuclear testing and natural resource exploitation which are both aspects of despoilment by clearly identifiable external agencies. These include the Marshallese from Bikini (Niedenthal 1997) and Enewetak (Tobin 1967) and Banabans from Ocean Island in the Kiribati chain (Silverman 1971). These communities were typically transferred wholesale from one island to another in the same general region.<sup>40</sup> It quickly became apparent that there were considerable distinctions between the causes for displacement between these Micronesian communities and the Kansas City Pohnpeian community. This led to an effort to parse out some of those differences in order to better situate the Pohnpeian community in one of these categories.<sup>41</sup>

Displacement takes on two principal interrelated meanings in the literature relative to peoples dispersed from their homelands.<sup>42</sup> The first is the general heading under which peoples separated from their homelands are categorized.<sup>43</sup> This includes migrant, immigrant, and diasporic communities which form on what appears to be a more ad hoc, individualized basis than those classified as specifically displaced by particular events, such as war and environment

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<sup>40</sup> Displaced Micronesian communities may again soon come to the fore as climate change causes relocations of at-risk atoll peoples (Campbell 2008).

<sup>41</sup> This effort at pigeon-holing the community, as we shall see, was futile – which is probably as it should be – but the exercise bore fruit nonetheless.

<sup>42</sup> Homi Bhabha (1989:66 [in Gupta & Ferguson 1992:10]) notes that those who remain in an inherited locale can experience displacement due to the impact of colonial forces on their relationship with ancestral places.

<sup>43</sup> See Clifford (1994:315), Turton (2005:258), Malkki (1992:24), Tsagarousianou (2003:60-61), and Clifford (2001:470).

degradation involving large groups and sometimes entire communities (Butler 2001:199). In this last group we find the more particularistic meaning of displaced communities. These communities are conceived of as “relocated” to clarify the distinction. Relocated communities include (but are not limited to) communities of refugees, groups living on reservations, and those displaced by environmental degradation.<sup>44</sup>

A commonality shared by all displaced communities is the construction of community by the displaced people in their new location in direct reference to the homeland from which they were alienated.<sup>45</sup> Silverman (1971:3-4) notes that his work with the Banabans of Kiribati, “is about one people and two islands: Ocean Island, the place from which most of the people (or their parents) came, and Rambi Island, the place where they are now. The physical distance between the two places is about sixteen hundred miles. In some aspects of the people’s lives, however, the conceptual distance between the two islands is minimal.” It is of relevance that the symbolics of land and blood remained central in the relocated Banaban community (Silverman 1971:5), as we see these principles in the Pohnpeian Kansas City community as well. Pohnpeians are one people in multiple locations, but all relate to one island. Whether they are in Guam, Hawaii, Cincinnati, or Kansas City, they are always oriented to Pohnpei. This connection is often through and for kin, but Pohnpei itself as a concept is ever-present, regardless of physical location.

Here displacement, displaced peoples, or displaced communities are defined by the generalized condition of separation of an individual, group, or community from a real or imagined homeland. Clifford characterizes the related lived phenomena as “dwelling-in-displacement” (Clifford 1994:310). A relocated community falls under this heading and is

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<sup>44</sup> See Malkki (1992:25), Clifford (1994:309-310), Clifford (2001:469-470), Silverman (1971), Niedenthal (1997), and Tobin (1967).

<sup>45</sup> See Silverman (1971:3-4), Marshall (2004), Burton *et al.* (2001).

understood as a specific group of people existing as a community in geographical separation from its homeland by virtue of mass relocation due to environmental degradation of any cause.

While movement is part of the general human condition (Butler 2001, Marshall 2004), groups of people that form in migration are differentiated from other groups displaced from their homeland. Migratory communities form as some individuals seeking temporary work migrate to locales where other such individuals have successfully found work and established *de facto* communities which resemble other displaced communities (De Genova 2005, Clifford 1994:303). This is so because the given group is comprised of people of the same ethnicity and from a common homeland. Communities such groups establish may be relatively permanent but they do not relate to other differentially situated groups from their common homeland in the way Butler (2001:195) finds that diasporic communities do. This is a critical distinction.

Migrations (of various types) can and often do lead to diasporic communities (De Genova 2005). These transnational migratory cum diasporic groups are “related by culture, ethnicity, language, and religion” (Tsagarousianou 2003:60-61). Migrants create diasporas by maintaining transnational ties to relatives in the homeland and imagining a community in a hierarchical, connected relationship to the homeland, but also in relationship to itself and other similar communities, facilitated by the complex confluence of nation-states, communication technologies, and global capitalism.<sup>46</sup>

Butler (2001:189) cautions us to remember that, “Human beings have been in perpetual motion since the dawn of time, but not all their movements have resulted in diasporas” (see also Gupta and Ferguson 1992:9). What constitutes a diaspora then?

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<sup>46</sup> See Sokefeld (2006:267-268), Gupta and Ferguson (1992:8), Appadurai (1990:15), and Butler (2001:190). Diasporic communities are distinct from immigrant communities in that there is no intention on the part of the diasporic community to assimilate to the host country. Immigrant communities feature less active resistance to acculturative processes (Clifford 1994:307).

William Safran offers a list of defining characteristics of diasporas: “1) dispersal to two or more locations 2) collective mythology of homeland 3) alienation from hostland 4) idealization of return to homeland 5) and 6) ongoing relationship with homeland (83–4)” Elaborating upon Safran’s list, Robin Cohen places greater emphasis on another feature—ethnonational consciousness—and, importantly, on whether a group not living in its homeland had the option of choosing between return and making a permanent home in diaspora (“Diasporas” 515) (Butler 2001:191-192).<sup>47</sup> (See also Clifford 1994:305-306, 315)

Butler adds that a diasporic community must be multigenerational in duration (*ibid*) to qualify as a diaspora. A community that achieves a return to its homeland in a single generation would be temporarily displaced but not diasporic.

Diaspora requires that people self-identify as a group, a specific type of imagined community, concerned with its perpetuation as a cultural unit, often with reference to hierarchical connections to homelands implicated by transnational flows.<sup>48</sup> Tsagarousianou (2003:64) encourages us to be cognizant of the complex multidirectionality of the “flows of human beings, ideas, products – cultural and physical and to forms of interaction, negotiation and exchange, processes of acculturation and cultural creativity, webs of exclusion and struggles to overcome it....” The Kansas City community features just such a feedback loop with Pohnpei proper revealing a multidirectionality of influences based on the flows mentioned. This has been noted above and will be discussed in more detail below.

Butler (2001:199-202) notes possible reasons for diasporic formations: captivity, state-eradication exile, forced and voluntary exile, emigration, migration, and imperial diaspora. She acknowledges that actual histories do not necessarily fit neatly into any of these groups, and multiple categories could apply. Tracing out the histories of the diasporic community becomes a

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<sup>47</sup> Butler (2001:195) and others have critiqued this definitional approach to diaspora, offering instead a framework for studying community formation focused on place (homeland, hostland, and the diasporan group itself). Cohen (in Butler 2001:197-198) seeks to differentiate diasporas along the lines of the categories of “victim, labor, trade, imperial, and cultural.” Butler (2001:199-202) argues (and I agree) that causes of initial dislocation leading to diaspora should be a research question rather than a categorical ascription used to define the diaspora.

<sup>48</sup> (Duarte 2005, Sokefeld 2006, Clifford 1994, Mavroudi 2007, Butler 2001:192, Gupta and Ferguson 1992:8, Tsagarousianou 2003:52)

research question to be examined through the lens of the reasons for displacement, relationships of the diasporic community with the homeland, hostland, and between diasporic communities (Butler 2001:209), including the formation of “diasporan capitals” (Butler 2001:211). This leads us to be attentive to issues of connectivity (Tsagarousianou 2003:52) as much as displacement. Connectivities between the diasporic community and the homeland (actual or imagined) and between diasporic communities with relationships to the same homeland are of interest.<sup>49</sup> The connectivity is ultimately kinship-based but the mediums utilized include smartphones, Facebook, Skype, and even YouTube video postings. The Kansas City community is a diasporan capital for Pohnpeians in diaspora. It frequently hosts events such as baseball tournaments and has hosted at least the past two Micronesian Women’s Day events drawing Pohnpeians from across the continental United States and even dignitaries from Pohnpei.

Despite the importance of lateral connections to diasporic communities, the yearning for a remembered homeland and the construction of an imagined homeland is typical of, and critical to, mobile and displaced peoples (Gupta & Ferguson 1992:10-11). Nostalgic yearnings are prevalent in these situations (Clifford 1994:307) and Rofel (1999:136-137) and Ivy (1995:10) both cite Susan Stewart (1993:23) in describing nostalgia as a felt lack, creating desire for a future that is based on an imagined past (Anagnost 1997:1-2). The founders of the Kansas City section sought to recreate their past in the future of the community by bringing the section formation to Kansas City. Their express desire was to inculcate their children with Pohnpeian tradition. Other families stress the importance of a permanent return to Pohnpei and require children to speak Pohnpeian at home. One first-generation Pohnpeian immigrant mother

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<sup>49</sup> Clifford (1994:306) believes that “Decentered, lateral connections may be as important as those formed around a teleology of origin/return. And a shared, ongoing history of displacement, suffering, adaptation, or resistance may be as important as the projection of a specific origin.” A strong, common identification seems to be key in both. He usefully points out (1994:321-322) that disproportionately focusing on the homeland relationship may obscure interesting lateral relationships between diasporic communities.

expressed that this was so her children will be “able to function in Pohnpeian society when they return.” Some of her children, born in America, have never been to Pohnpei but their hoped-for future move to Pohnpei is characterized as a return rather than an arrival.

Thus displacement need not connote a disconnection with homeland, a lack of empowerment, or an absence of cultural and existential roots (Clifford 2001:483). This is not to downplay the fact that displacement often causes considerable distress to those who experience it (Malkki 1992:33). Rather it is to say that the experience of displacement occurs with reference to an imagined place, and that an appreciation of the fact that there “is no such thing as a pure point of origin” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987:10, in Malkki 1992:37) opens an appreciation for mobility – not just of bodies, but relationships, particularly attachments to places constructed in lived experience, remembrances, and imaginings.

Diasporic and relocated communities by definition have a keen awareness of their distinctiveness from their larger host communities, as well as differences from their forebears and residents of their homelands. While these types of communities are related they are not the same, as has been established above. Relocated communities have a clearer idea of what the reasons for their displacement are. The causal connection between their current and previous physical location (i.e. the reason for their displacement) is often painfully obvious – either military activity (all too often American) or economic extraction, both resulting in despoilment and exploitation.<sup>50</sup> Those in diaspora do not seem to experience the causality of their displacement so directly or acutely. Although they do make some connections to difficult economic conditions and social changes due to historical interaction primarily with Western nation-states and their citizens – initially sailors, traders, and missionaries, later, soldiers, bureaucrats, and social scientists. In fact the causal chain implicating their displacement can be

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<sup>50</sup> See Tobin (1967), Silverman (1971), and Niedenthal (1997).



masked by the diffuse multiplicity of forces drawing them in or prodding them on in migration in pursuit of the ability to pay for basic goods, support family, to live closer to family, attend schools, and so forth where global capitalism, an extension of colonial imperialism, lurks undetected.<sup>51</sup> The following discussion relates the concepts of diaspora and migration more directly to Micronesian experiences.

### ***Micronesian Movement***

*From the dawn of history, human beings have moved around and migrated. Micronesians – especially the atoll dwellers with their sophisticated deep water sailing canoes and remarkably accurate star compass – not only migrated originally to their island homes via sea highways, but they also maintained a high degree of mobility through interisland voyages. Movement, migration, and voyaging beyond the horizon are nothing new to Micronesian people. – Mac Marshall 2004:6*

While experiencing all of the aspects of displacement we have mentioned (relocation, migration, and diaspora), the most prevalent current condition of displaced Micronesians aligns most closely with diaspora for reasons that follow. Because much of this experience is common to the Pohnpeians in Kansas City, the literature on the Micronesian diaspora is utilized for backgrounding the Pohnpeian experience of diaspora in Kansas City. The Micronesian diaspora has its early roots in primarily the 1970's as college scholarships were opened up to Micronesian youth (Ballendorf 2005:217, Allen 1997:20). The explosion of Micronesian out-migration is traced to the implementation of the Compact of Free Association. The Compact's provision that allows open access to the United States and its territories by Micronesians is particularly important (Burton, *et al.* 2001:90, Shimizu 1996). This crucially includes the ability to work in the United States without visa requirements (Hanlon 2009:102). Whereas relocated Micronesian communities are traceable to external forces, as we have seen, Micronesian diasporas are linked to Marshall's (2004:134) "Four E's: education, employment, entertainment, and excitement;"

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<sup>51</sup> See Petersen (1979), Petersen (1986), Hanlon (1998), Marshall (2004).

which appear to be motivated by individual considerations. A contextualization of the Micronesian diaspora within the broader political and economic conditions of the world (Wolf 1982:3-4, 361) leads to the conclusion that Micronesian migration has roots in global capitalist hegemony. Regardless of ultimate causes the Micronesian diaspora is formed by individuals, married couples, and nuclear families rather than mass relocation (Allen 1997:21). As is common to Micronesians in diaspora (Burton *et al.* 2001), economic concerns are the primary reasons cited for migration among Pohnpeians in Kansas City.

Other studies of diasporic Micronesians mention community organization facilitated by home government recognition (Burton *et al.* 2001), church participation (Allen 1997:85, Marshall 2004), and naming of housing clusters (Marshall 2004). Micronesian migration has followed an anchor, link, and chain pattern whereby early migrants came to the United States for education, then dropped out to pursue economic gratification (Shimizu 1996). Family members learned of the economic opportunities and followed the early migrants to their United States locales (Shimizu 1996, Allen 1997). Ties to the home islands and positions in the traditional hierarchies are sometimes mentioned (Marshall 2004, Schulte 2012), but my review of the literature indicates that traditional Micronesian chiefly hierarchies are not reproduced in diaspora. Only rarely does a similar manifestation (but with crucial differences) appear in Polynesian communities, specifically in the appointment of Samoan lineage chiefs (Macpherson 1970 in Kallen 1982, Johnston 2010, Lilomaiava-Doktor 2009, Lee and Francis 2009).<sup>52</sup>

In common with other Micronesians in diaspora, Pohnpeians in Kansas City migrate under the Compact of Free Association motivated by the “Four E’s,” are linked to kin in migration flows, live in clusters, work in food service or food processing (Schulte 2012), and associate with

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<sup>52</sup> Pohnpeians have similar positions to that of lineage chiefs, which are hereditary and travel with them in diaspora. The section organization, and concomitant titles are much more elaborate and of greater import in the general Pohnpeian conception of sociopolitical position.

one another almost exclusively outside of work (Allen 1997:77).<sup>53</sup> The Kansas City community's official organization by traditional chiefly authority is unique as compared to other diasporic communities (even Pohnpeian ones). Although the largest and earliest settlement of Pohnpeians outside of Pohnpei is in Guam, from my experience living among Pohnpeians in Guam between 1992 and 1994 I can attest that the traditional section organization did not exist there then, and there are no reports that it does currently.

Returning to the categorical discussion of displaced communities, one might expect such a land-based, traditional sociopolitical institution as the Pohnpeian section to exist within a relocated community; its existence in what otherwise fits as a diasporic community is anomalous. Wholesale relocation of communities creates a dynamic that carries over many inherent relations and relationships of the previous location though not without friction and reordering (Silverman 1971). The social conditions are largely similar and the actors within the community generally consistent. In such a milieu one would expect important sociopolitical structures and related ceremonies to persist. Despite the often keen recognition of ties to home by those more diffusely and (superficially at least) idiosyncratically displaced in diaspora, the sheer density of day-to-day contact with home community members is missing. Even for those in more densely populated regions, as noted by at least three Marshallese communities in Enid, Orange County, and Little Rock, there is considerable interaction with out-group actors.<sup>54</sup>

Further, recognition of the community by the home island is often based on government or religious organizations, rather than traditional authority.<sup>55</sup> The recognition of a relocated community as a legitimate sociopolitical entity inheres in the community itself. The Pohnpeian community in Kansas City has characteristics of diasporic diffusion and relocated density, and

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<sup>53</sup> This is not exclusively the case, but predominantly so in the Kansas City community.

<sup>54</sup> See Allen (1997), Burton *et al.* (2001), and Schulte (2012), respectively.

<sup>55</sup> See also Allen (1997), Burton *et al.* (2001), and Schulte (2012).

inherent legitimacy by virtue of homeland recognition of its organization as a traditional Pohnpeian section under the authority of a traditional paramount chief. We see in the Kansas City section some interesting combinations of relocated and diasporic community traits. Aspects of this study that have been mentioned but largely left unaddressed are explored in the following chapter – location and locality.

## VII. Location and Locality

*“Kiht mehn Pohnpei kin sawaspene. Kaiden duwete mehn Wai me kin kahng sewese aramas.”* – first-generation Kansas City Pohnpeian woman (approximately sixty years old) living in Kansas City

*We, the Pohnpeians, help one another; it’s what we do. We’re not like Americans who don’t like to help others.*

*“Mehn Wai kesempwaliki mwohni; mehn Pohnpei kin kesempwaliki aramas.”* – ibid

*Americans privilege money over relationships; for Pohnpeians, people are always most important.*

### ***Reverse Colonization and the Micronesian Archipelago***

There are several aspects of geographic location and political affiliation that intersect in the Pohnpeian Kansas City community. If we follow Gunder-Frank’s notion of centers and peripheries in colonialism (Wolf 1982), Marshall’s (2004) concept of reverse colonization locates the island home at the center and the United States-based colonies at the periphery (see also Chappell 1999). In this conception Pohnpei is the center and Kansas City is the periphery. The expansion of the sociopolitical system of Pohnpei to Kansas City appears to be a particularly salient example of this form of reverse colonialism. The peripheral actor (Pohnpei) has organized a polity within the bounds of the center (the United States).

However, these conceptions fail to consider a crucial aspect of colonialism – power relations. Drawing people from the peripheries to the center reproduces power relations in a particularly insidious way. The power differential that was formerly often opaque and distant is now up-close and all-too-personal. For instance an older Pohnpeian man expressed this frustration that is manifest economically in his workplace in conversation at a kava market in October of 2013.

I developed a time-saving technique that has been adopted by all of the workers in my department. The corporate guys noted that the productivity of the Kansas City warehouse is nearly double that of the Iowa warehouse of the same size. Management knows I developed this. I am also the best trainer they have. When it came time for a raise, all I got was \$.22 per hour. A cost of living increase. I told the manager, you know if I was an American, I

would get five or ten times as much! With all I do for them, that's all I get, and it's because they see me as just a Micronesian. – Pohnpeian resident of Kansas City in his fifties

Moving from Pohnpei to America shifts the power relations between the United States and Micronesia from the background to the foreground for many of the putative colonizers. The direction of movement of people is reversed as compared to typical colonialism but the power relations that structure that movement are stronger and more salient than ever. Thus the would-be colonizing migrants remain the colonized despite migrating to the center from the periphery.

Pohnpeian people locate themselves physically in relation Pohnpei as a geographic entity. They locate themselves as a people in relation to Pohnpei but also in juxtaposition against those around them in their own form of orientalism (Said 1978). As the opening quotations of this chapter draw out the sense of locality that Pohnpeians develop is one based on an ethic of mutual support. But this ethic of mutual support is made more salient by their immersion in the contemporary United States with its emphasis on consumerism and the tool that facilitates this system – money. For Pohnpeians in Kansas City, money is primarily a tool for mutual support, not for conspicuous consumption. They see Americans as primarily out for themselves, unconcerned with others and their welfare. This is a powerful and oft-repeated narrative by Pohnpeians; it structures their social relationships which generate the sense of locality and community experienced by the groups they form in the United States.

The Micronesian diaspora has been mapped onto the United States by some as the Micronesian archipelago in America. Linda Allen (1997) used this to situate the Marshallese community she studied as the “Enid [Oklahoma] Atoll.” The Micronesian diaspora appears as communities of islands separated by vast expanses of land connected by highways accessible by car, rather than as islands separated by vast expanses of ocean connected by seaways accessible by outrigger canoe. In the electronic age these physical separations are of decreasing importance

in some critical ways (Appadurai 1990:15), expanding the field of meaning from geographically bounded community to a broader field, linking dispersed peoples (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001:413) (and separating adjoining ones). Like the Banabans of Silverman's (1971) study, the separations, whether within the diasporic Micronesian archipelago or between it and the home islands are reduced, and in some cases nearly eliminated, in the minds of the people (Anderson [1983] 1991).

This leads to a point where the intersection of location and production of locality can be considered. The physical locations of the homeland and displaced communities are clearly disparate. Communities are constructed with reference to the homeland in connection with other communities in the hostland, conceivably multiple hostlands.

### ***Conceptions of Locality in the Literature and Its Production by Pohnpeians in Kansas City***

Arjun Appadurai (1996) discusses the production of locality in this age of globalization, drawing out concepts apropos the Kansas City community of Pohnpeians.<sup>56</sup> While many of these principles are applicable, especially the relational and contextual nature of locality (1996:178), conceiving of production of neighborhood as a situated community (1996:179) is particularly useful. The organization of Kansas City as a section situates the community in the Pohnpeian world. It links section members to Pohnpei, its sociopolitical structure and tradition, and provides ontological situation in the world that these collectively imply.

The section had a Pohnpeian name conferred upon it by the paramount chief when it was organized. Keith Basso (1996:5, in Marshall 2004:124) has noted that by naming a new place newcomers are "place-making." Naming maps perceptions of old places onto new places and implies "cultural possession," a concomitant "intention to remain and put down roots" (Marshall

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<sup>56</sup> I am aware that there are many critiques of globalization (i.e. Pierre Bourdieu, David Harvey) as a mask for neo-liberalism. Eric Wolf advocates for situating synchronic studies within their diachronic contexts. I hope to address how those approaches can be brought to bear on the Pohnpeian phenomenon in Kansas City at another time.

2004:124). This “localizes” the new place in terms of the group’s understandings of who they are and where they come from (ibid). It marks a critical juncture in the creation of place.

Regarding the Namoluk people Marshall (2004:135) says:

Place matters. It gives us identity, shapes our imagination and experience and informs our understanding of the world around us. It is both matter as well as metaphor, a source of material as well as of cultural and spiritual sustenance. It can be ‘home’ or ‘away’” ([Brij V. Lal] in press). Whether they be at home on their little atoll in the wide sea, or away on larger islands or distant continents in a wide world, chon Namoluk are who they are because of where they are from.

In the Kansas City section, both the home and away elements are present in the section’s name. Its actual name (*Kousapw en Pohnleng en Kansas City*) simultaneously relates to a home place, the present locale, and the relationship between them, situating them in the Pohnpeian constellation of places.

We see this all over the United States as geographic locations are named for cities, countries, and tribes relevant to those who settled the areas. Like the Namoluk these groups take it upon themselves to name places. A key distinction is that a traditional Pohnpeian paramount tribal chief named the Kansas City section. The *Kousapw en Pohnleng en Kansas City* goes almost beyond a simple name, even one with historical relevance; it feels more like an honorary title, a story of potentially legendary significance in a phrase. In short, it is uniquely Pohnpeian. The name of the Kansas City section situates people geographically, historically, and metaphorically with reference to Pohnpei.

The primary matrilineage in the Kansas City section hails from the Wene area of Kiti, where Pohnleng is located. Wene’s history is complex, rich, and deep (Hanlon 2004). Traditionally Wene had greater importance than that of a typical area in Pohnpei, and it retains this prestige as a broader area today. Wene could be regarded historically as a “capital” section and was at times a tribal district itself. It was previously known as Onohnleng (Falgout 1987:36), and while the



original meaning appears to be lost, its component morphemes clearly signify something to do with heaven or the sky (Goodenough 1986) – possibly its order, binding, or mending. The priest-king of Onohnleng was titled *Soukisenleng*, which translates as “Master Part of Heaven” (Falgout 1987). There is a connection through the naming conventions of the Kansas City section to its primary matriline’s previous home section in Wene and the initial Kansas City section chief’s home was a section of Wene called Pohnleng.

Appadurai conceives of neighborhood community as spatial or virtual. Neighborhoods are characterized by their actuality, “their potential for social reproduction” (Appadurai 1996:179). Pohnpeians in Kansas City often live and work in clusters, but the neighborhood they form is as much virtual as it is spatial, with communication flowing through smartphones, cell phones, Facebook, Skype, YouTube, and “the coconut wireless” (analogous to “the grapevine”). Frequent face-to-face gatherings reinforce the actuality of their relationships. The in-person interactions in preparation for and at the feasts are crucial to the production of locality by Pohnpeians in Kansas City. Virtual and spatial aspects of neighborhood are inexorably tied together, intricately interwoven. They form connections through their clustered residences and tendency to work with other Pohnpeians. The Pohnpeian neighborhood in Kansas City is a complex combination of the virtual and the spatial. As these multiple modes of connectivity are deployed through kinship networks, people coordinate in-person meetings when logistically and economically feasible. The annual baseball tournament and Micronesian Women’s Day celebrations with their competitive aspects of sport and dance are particularly noteworthy. The baseball tournament in 2013 drew a senator and his wife from Pohnpei to the United States as attendees. The section feasts provide more regular and custom-laden but less inclusive venues.

Appadurai's concept of production of locality has been put to use by David Hanlon (2004:210) where he states that: "Space and time are themselves socialized through complex and deliberate human practices that include work, performance, ritual, and remembering." This takes place in the age of globalization with its multidirectional flows of people and ideas against the backdrop of a history of colonialism and within hierarchical nation-states that impinge upon relatively stable places. Hanlon continues by noting that: "The identity of place is no longer exclusive but has become unfixed, contested, and multiple. Places are not defined by physical boundaries or borders but have links and connections with other areas that make places porous and open" (ibid). This flexibility has allowed for the transposition of the history of the Wene area, specifically Pohnleng, to Kansas City, via section organization, with its metaphorical ties to Pohnleng in Wene.<sup>57</sup> It is another factor in the construction of Kansas City as a Pohnpeian place.

Keeping in mind that people make places in geographical spaces, in some respects, Kansas City is no less Pohnpei than Wene itself, and is, at times, produced as a specifically Wene neighborhood. Kansas City has less direct and dense Pohnpeian history, but has imported some of the history of the Wene area, particularly with reference to Pohnleng, with its prestigious history. As both are porous, Wene is in Kansas City and Kansas City is in Wene. Taking a part for the geopolitical whole, Pohnpei is in the United States and the United States is in Pohnpei.

There is competition for establishment of place in Kansas City with other groups. Multiple people claim the same spaces simultaneously creating different places. The rapidity and frequency with which construction of new places in the awareness of given communities occurs is increasing when viewed in a historical frame. The Pohnpeians of diaspora display adaptability and reshape the spaces they encounter into Pohnpeian places, just as their ancestors did to

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<sup>57</sup> It is a fortuitous coincidence that Hanlon's particular work here is focused on the Wene area of Kiti, which happens to be the home of our section founder and the present section chief, and his family.

Pohnpei itself, based on clan, section, and tribe (Hanlon 2004). This is especially pronounced and clear in the Kansas City section. As Pohnpeian people come together, for example, in a Kansas City a space, they make it a Pohnpeian place – not forever, or in exclusion of others who may see Kansas City as, for instance, Jackson County, Missouri, USA.<sup>58</sup> Pohnpei is in Kansas City; this is particularly clear during section-related activities.

The contested, multiple, porous, open nature of place that Hanlon (2004:210) noted is important to remember. Mutability of place is a constant condition of human existence. Pohnpeians have dealt, and do deal, with this fact. Hanlon (2004:203) discussed the chiefly culture which emerged in Pohnpeian prehistory to assist those seeking to carve out their place among competing groups. The living heir of this chiefly culture is the Pohnpeian section which, in connection with the living heirs of some of those individuals who generated it (the Pohnpeian people), establishes Pohnpeians as Pohnpeian among the competing groups in Kansas City, marking it as a Pohnpeian place. The section and its concomitant organization, titles, rituals, practices, feasts, and general ways of being serve to create Kansas City as a Pohnpeian locality, generated by and generating a structure of feeling that is Pohnpeian. This structure of feeling is constructed by language, bodily movements and postures, food choice, eating styles, speeches, and the organization of space and time. This explains why the feast in the opening section was experienced as a Pohnpeian place despite being in Kansas City.

The openness of place and its increasing porousness presents a paradox of simultaneous opportunity and threat. Appadurai looks at “locality [as] ephemeral unless hard and regular work is undertaken to produce and maintain its materiality” and emphasizes that there are “more abstract effects of this work on the production of locality as a structure of feeling” (1996:180-181) that call for attention. Hugh Raffles (1999:323) emphasizes key aspects of locality:

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<sup>58</sup> Kansas City maps itself onto several counties and two states, although it is organized separately in the states.

Locality is both embodied and narrated and is, as a consequence, often highly mobile: places travel with the people through whom they are constituted. Locality, then, should not be confused with location. It is, rather, a set of relations, an ongoing politics, a density, in which places are discursively and imaginatively materialized and enacted through the practices of variously positioned people and political economies.

Producing reliably local neighborhoods as places where people are produced as subjects who are recognized and organized is critical (Appadurai 1996:181). It has been noted that within the Pohnpeian feasthouse titles are necessary for recognition of the individual as a social person available for social interaction. Most generally these are section titles. The Kansas City section brings active titles to Pohnpeians in Kansas City.

Neighborhoods are context-driven and context-generative (Appadurai 1996:186). The Pohnpeian section in Kansas City is driven partially through the context of the traditional organization of the section and its link to Pohnpei itself; it is context-generative by producing a field in which Pohnpeians in Kansas City maintain themselves as Pohnpeians, to shape their children as Pohnpeians, and produce Pohnpeian-ness in practice (Appadurai 1996:190). Hanlon (2004:210-211) noted that the groundedness of locality “implies control from within over the conduct and organization of everyday life and against those faceless abstractions that include capital, globalization, and the nation-state.” This is the situation with which Pohnpeians in Kansas City constantly contend.

Production of locality in disparate locations conversely potentially produces twice marginalized subjectivities – people are neither “true” Islanders nor “true” Americans (Gegeo 2001:501). This tension plays out in peoples’ daily lives. First generation Pohnpeian migrants, while frequently fluent in English and familiar with American idioms, slang, and pop-culture, are not wholly integrated into the American flow.<sup>59</sup> Social and linguistic competence, as well as the

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<sup>59</sup> Granted, there is no single American “flow,” but first-generation Pohnpeians’ interface with American life is primarily with work and school (for their children). Other activities are organized around their own community.

possession of a title in Pohnpei are critical to being recognized as a fully socialized actor, and are often intrinsic to the identity of individuals. Since migration has become a common occurrence, the traditional policy has been to strip the migrant leaving Pohnpei of his title.<sup>60</sup> This act is sometimes accompanied by vague promises that the title will be returned at a later time or that the migrant can reenter the *ahlen mwahr* (or “path of titles”) upon return to Pohnpei. The Kansas City section formation was specifically pursued by its initiatory actors in part to combat such disconcerting outcomes.

In Appadurai’s terminology (1996:64-65) we could ask whether the Kansas City section is a transnational structure mixed with cosmopolitan genealogy or a traditional institution simply unmoored from original location? Said another way and echoing discussions above, is it more of a diasporic community or a relocated one? Or does it resist isomorphic classification and feature aspects of each, in a unique formulation? These questions will be addressed shortly.

### ***Imagined Community***

In this context, place is constructed with reference to the category of diasporic communities which are typically classified as imagined communities in the tradition of Benedict Anderson’s ([1983] 1991) concept (Sokefeld 2006:267). Imagined communities feature attributes reminiscent of kinship and religion (Anderson [1983] 1991:5-7), forming indefinite stretchable nets of kinship and clientship and deep horizontal comradeship. They create a “fiction [which] seeps quietly and continuously into reality, creating that remarkable confidence of community” (Anderson [1983] 1991:35-36).

Kennedy and Roudometof (2001, 9, 17) feel, for example, that “communities are units of belonging whose members perceive that they share moral, aesthetic/expressive or cognitive meanings, thereby gaining a sense of personal as well as group identity”. Although this can

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<sup>60</sup> This practice is changing as the latest generation of chiefs in Pohnpei is accustomed to migration and the potential benefits for them. Both the incipient Madolenihmw section and the Kansas City section are implicated.

put up boundaries between who is seen as a member and who is not, “communities...are consciously constructed and continuously reinvented” (ibid) (Mavroudi 2007:6).

At the same time, diaspora cultures work to maintain community, selectively preserving and recovering traditions, "customizing" and "versioning" them in novel, hybrid, and often antagonistic situations (Clifford 1994:317).

The discussion of tradition implied here will be deferred, but aspects of imagined community are now considered, particularly in the context of how Pacific Islanders conceive of construction of community in relation to geographic location.

Clifford (2001:476) cites anthropologist Epeli Hau'ofa (1993) for a vision of Pacific Islander perpetual motion, migration without borders, and reconceptualization of identity.<sup>61</sup> This is facilitated by relays between communities utilizing modern transportation and communication in homology to ancient voyaging canoes. This state of being does not require a special name or categorization for Pacific peoples; it involves empowerment, movement paradoxically rooted in perpetual landedness (Clifford 2001:483). Pacific Islander mobility is conceived of as circular migration (Gegeo 2001:494-495). Pohnpeians hold their relationship to Kansas City as a temporary stay and relate their community (particularly the section) to metaphorical landedness. The land they are connected to is their homeland, not where they are currently located. Their creation of place in displacement is in relation to home place, linked to it and based upon it metaphorically.

This presents a potential paradox. Pohnpeians self-describe their stay in the United States and their U.S. based communities as temporary. But they have organized (have been organized) as a traditional section, implying permanent place built up by Pohnpeian people. The social sciences conspire to categorize the community as a diasporic one. All of the boxes of diaspora can be checked relative to the Kansas City Pohnpeian community – there are two or more

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<sup>61</sup> Hau'ofa was a Fijian anthropologist and writer of Tongan descent, born in Papua New Guinea, educated in Australia (<http://www.pacificarts.org/node/187>).

locations of Pohnpeian communities outside of the Pohnpeian homeland, bound by a collective mythology of the homeland, existing in alienation to a hostland, with an idealized return to the homeland, in an ongoing relationship with the homeland. In a related context noted to broaden this perspective, Pacific scholar David Welchman Gegeo observes: “For the Kwara‘ae, therefore, because of the possibility of space, a person can be anywhere and still be inextricably tied to place. Place is portable and, as we Kwara‘ae say, ‘It’s in our blood.’ It is in the notion of the portability of place that I see an alternative conceptualization...” (Gegeo 2001:495).

Viewed through this lens the Pohnpeian concept of temporary stay can be brought full circle. If place travels with person, then it is unproblematic to have a Pohnpeian land-based formation such as a traditional section located in Kansas City, itself a non-Pohnpeian space as defined by boundaries of the nation-state and in comparison to the dominant surrounding group. Further, if migration is assumed to be circular, ending back in the home village to fulfill traditional obligations, then the temporary stay concept fits (Gegeo 2001:496). By viewing the section system as a social institution rather than a land-based socio-political formation, there is no contradiction to begin with; the institution stays, while the people come and go to and from Pohnpei as a relatively stable geographic entity. Taking another approach, if the concept of place is shifted from one based on geographical location (even one that is “in [one’s] blood”) to one based on a community of people coming together to form a locality that creates the structure of feeling inherent in place, more flexibility is achieved, creating a conception more closely approximating the way people experience place.

## VIII: Concepts of Place

*A sense of place is strong among the people of Pohnpei. Despite the disruptive pressures brought on by colonialism and more recently globalization, an identification with place continues to inform peoples' sense of themselves and their past. – David Hanlon 2004:195*

### ***Place Based on Community***

*I believe that the vitality of Ponapean social and political life, seen in the context of the surrounding world at the end of the twentieth century, is due to the extraordinary sense that Ponapeans have of creating their own communities. – Glenn Petersen 1982a:139*

As this portion of the discussion focuses on community, the term itself warrants definition.

A community is a group of people with “shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility” as well as a sense of belonging (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001:412-413). Community implies identification with other members of the group and a sense of being collectively different from other groups. This sense of uniqueness is reinforced by rituals and traditions which convey meanings, norms, and values that are made public and lead to social practices common to, and shared by, the group.<sup>62</sup> The sense of moral responsibility common to community points to a commitment to the well-being of the group and to its individual members (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001:413). Mutual intelligibility facilitated by experiential overlaps is required to form communities and generate places situated in geographical spaces.

Characterizations of community emphasize shared identifications and positive sentiments. However, conflict and struggle occur within the group as “crosscutting identifications and conflicting interests” are deployed in mobilizing people (Sokefeld 2006:279). In Kansas City this is particularly true of the Kiti and Madolenihmw tribal identities and interests. Absent a strong motivation such as affinal kinship, Madolenihmw tribal identity largely precludes

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<sup>62</sup> This is drawn from Muniz and O’Guinn (2001:413) who cite Durkheim ([1915] 1965), Weber ([1922] 1978), Douglass and Isherwood (1979), and Marshall (1994).



participation in the Kansas City section with its link to Kiti and economic production inuring to the benefit of the Kiti paramount chief.

Communities are hierarchically organized (Gupta and Ferguson 1992) and diasporic communities maintain structured travel circuits, linking members “at home” and “away” (Clifford 1994:309). The Kansas City section provides hierarchical organization and links Pohnpeians in Kansas City to Pohnpei through the traditional sociopolitical system. This serves to augment other factors that contribute to the Pohnpeian community in Kansas City. The section system overlays and supports these other relationships, creating a structure of feeling that is Pohnpeian, making it a Pohnpeian place.

### ***Space, Place, and the Imaginary***

*This land [The United States] is an empty wasteland for our people. We have no land here that is our own. And even if we did, this land will not produce what we need to live. There are no breadfruit, banana, coconut, or mango trees. We cannot grow our taro, sweet potatoes, or yams here. We cannot go fishing on the reef or in the open ocean. But we do have each other. We must live together in cooperative communities and offer each other constant mutual support. This is what will allow us to survive here in this desert wasteland.* – paraphrased and translated from a speech given by a Pohnpeian nun at the 2013 Micronesian Women’s Day Celebration

Concepts of place often start with reference to geographic space. Geographic space is straightforward enough for these purposes. It simply means the physical location, with its geographical and built formations encountered by people.<sup>63</sup> And while space remains a part of place, place is here conceived of as being based on community, mutual intelligibility, and experiential overlap – a shared consciousness.

The Pohnpeian nun’s exhortations to the Pohnpeians noted in the opening quotation of this section clearly reflect these aspects of place based on community. In this case, the lack of

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<sup>63</sup> We could get bogged down here in parsing out where the built environment should land in terms of space or place (Tilley 1994, Robin 2002), but the built environment preexists our encounter with space in virtually every case, so I am lumping it with space. This is not to detract from the intentionality of the builders and the particular meaning that certain structures and layouts have for specific people or peoples.

importance of American geographical space for creation of place for Pohnpeians is drawn out quite starkly. This conception of American space is that it is essentially a tabula rasa. Pohnpeian community and the places they generate are crucially based on people and their interrelationships, not the specific geographic location. Other conceptions of place making will be considered as well.

Gegeo's (2001:495) notion of place is that it is portable, that "it's in [one's] blood." However, individuals may not carry place with them in such a straightforward portable sense, as Gegeo's statement suggests. What individuals clearly do carry are memories of place, corporeal manifestations of place, and the potential for creation of place. A solitary individual carrying a place (manifestations, memories, and potentialities) formed in a distant homeland, is immediately encountered in the context of diaspora by a hostland group as idiosyncratic.<sup>64</sup> The place this encounter creates is one of confusion, probably temporary and mild rupture for the hostland group, and disorientation for the bearer of latent place. This is because the interloper and the hostland group lack sufficient shared understandings for mutually intelligible interpretations of their common space. Experiential overlap can be gained, mutual intelligibility achieved, and meaningful places created by people of different backgrounds, given time. But lacking the prerequisites it takes time and effort for people to make places. Places, like the famous Geertzian view of culture (Geertz 1973:7), are public and for the same reason: public for a certain group capable of creating and grasping the shared meanings of culture, necessary for creation of place.

Conversely, should two or more members of the same homeland come together in a diasporic hostland, they can create, through mutual intelligibility based on experiential overlap, a place with reference to their homeland out of a foreign space. Objects, even alien ones, take on mutual

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<sup>64</sup> Hostland here means those people already living in the place experienced as foreign by the diasporic peoples.

intelligibility and shared meaning through the experiential overlap of the diasporic individuals. It will not be the same place with the same meanings as those experienced by hostland characters, but it will be a place in the migrants' shared understandings, however fleeting and tenuous.

Those familiar with the Christian tradition may recognize this conceptualization of place based on shared identification and mutual intelligibility as reminiscent of something Jesus said.<sup>65</sup> "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20, KJV). Where two or three Pohnpeians are together, there is Pohnpei also. Pohnpeians, in fact, do support this sort of concept. They allow that when they are together, even though the geographical location may be marked out as Kansas City, the place they create together is decidedly Pohnpeian. Taking Pohnpei as a structure of feeling, Pohnpei is among them, and, therefore, they are in Pohnpei. Many Christians would say that Christ is literally present in a gathering of his followers, like his body and blood are literally present in communion bread and wine. But just as other Christians would say that the presence of Christ in the host is symbolic but still in that way real, so too the presence of Pohnpei in Kansas City is symbolic but nonetheless real, for symbols constitute a (metaphorical, imaginary, cognitive) form of reality.

This comparison can be carried further. The relation between Pohnpei and a section, especially a diasporic one such as Kansas City, seems a lot like the relation between Christ and the Church. In a very real sense (via traditional sociopolitical organization), the Kansas City section is a part of the place that is Pohnpei, although everybody knows that in a purely geographical sense it is far removed from it. Sections bring people together as congregations,

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<sup>65</sup> In addition to his many other contributions, I am indebted to Dr. Hanson for bringing this example to my attention and drawing out a number of the succeeding thoughts.

just as local churches do. The metaphysical implications of invoking aspects of religion, especially a specific figure such as Jesus, to relate to social organization of a diasporic community may not be immediately apparent, but they are very much apropos. Pohnpeians regard Pohnpei itself as sacred. Being Pohnpeian is every bit as fundamental to Pohnpeians' identities as being Christian is to Christians.

This represents another step in making places of spaces, and with more members bearing the right degree of experiential overlap, facilitating mutual intelligibility, with longer occupation of the spaces, and more people bearing the prerequisite modes of understanding, the place becomes increasingly stable, with a deeper history, and more cultural density. A specific place may take on relevance within the constellation of diasporic places through movement of people and experiences (facilitated by transportation, communication, and narrative); eventually the place may even obtain salience in the homeland's imaginary, extending homeland identity to the diasporic place. This point is reinforced by the fact that the Kansas City section has the status of a section in Pohnpei. It is more a part of Pohnpei than just a bunch of Pohnpeians living in Cincinnati or even in Guam. Following are some of the more specific ways that Pohnpeian place is experienced and uniquely produced in Kansas City, particularly with reference to the section.

### ***A Multiplicity of Diffuse Forces Localized in the Kansas City Community***

The manner in which Nicholas de Genova (2005:7) characterizes his ethnography about Mexican migration in Chicago could likewise apply to Pohnpeians in Kansas City:

The research that is the basis for this book emerged from a multiplicity of sites across a metropolitan space that is not at all delimited by a bounded geographical locale, and moreover, is not reducible simply to a population of Mexican people contained in such a place. Not merely an "ethnic enclave" or an "immigrant" ghetto, then, Mexican Chicago is a conjuncture of social *relations* and thus comprises innumerable places. Understood as a conjuncture of the national and the transnational, furthermore, Mexican Chicago is constituted through the everyday social relations and meaningful practices.... (emphasis in original)

De Genova emphasizes race, capitalism, and nationalism, which are also factors implicating the Pohnpeian experience in Kansas City. These factors are acknowledged but taken as background with which to foreground the unique aspects of this study. We return to the local nexus of social forces experienced by Pohnpeians in the production of their particular locality in Kansas City. In addition to the backgrounded aspects of race, colonialism, and nationalism, Pohnpeians in Kansas City choose to engage (or not) with the traditional chieftainship and section system.

It was noted above that those who choose not to engage with the Kansas City section typically do not have strong consanguinal or affinal ties to the core group of participants in the section. They have other loyalties (primarily tribal) that effectively preclude participation in the section. Still others focus on its deviations, rather than continuities, as compared to “traditional Pohnpei” and use that as a justification for not engaging with the Kansas City section. This choice of whether or not to engage with the section and its chiefly hierarchy has implications for Pohnpeians in their social interactions in Kansas City, in Pohnpei, as well as for and with their children. One of the reasons cited specifically for organizing the Kansas City section is that it provides a nexus for the production of Pohnpeian-ness. The activities of the section, (primarily feasts), provide a setting in which Pohnpeians learn proper social interaction in traditional settings and generate Pohnpeian identities bound up in traditional titles.

By engaging in the section system Pohnpeians learn and practice how to be Pohnpeian in the context of feasts modeled after those of the home island and its social norms. Section activities in Kansas City, sanctioned by Pohnpeian chiefly authority, following traditional Pohnpeian forms without rigidly adhering to them, integrated with the traditional sociopolitical structure, invoke Pohnpei as a structure of feeling. The section creates a distinctly Pohnpeian place in an otherwise American space.

Such characteristically Pohnpeian activities such as oratory (Keating 1998), dancing (Hezel 1983), competitive production (Petersen 1986, Riesenberg 1968), kava consumption, and chiefly redistribution (Petersen 1986) are integral parts of these gatherings. The particular sort of Pohnpeian language used at the feasts is different from typical use on at least three levels. First, the proper language to be used at feasts is generally that of the “high” or “respect” language known as *lokaian maing* (Keating 1998). Second, the structure of a public speech does not always follow that of typical Pohnpeian grammar and is something for which one must acquire a feel (Keating 1998). Inability to speak in the proper form limits one’s social mobility. Third, one sees on display here how to address chiefs and other notables with the proper verbal respect and deference.

It has been noted that virtually every man in Pohnpei has a title; most women do as well, either independently or via companion titles tied to their husband’s position. Pohnpeian sections are the principal source of chiefly titles, which situate people in Pohnpeian social space. Absent section participation in Kansas City, an active title is unavailable to a non-resident of Pohnpei. This is another sense in which Pohnpei is in Kansas City. If to hold an active Pohnpeian title one must reside in Pohnpei and Kansas City section members hold Pohnpeian titles, then Kansas City is Pohnpei.

As mentioned, district level titles have been stripped of those leaving Pohnpei, and section level titles have typically received the same treatment. That does not mean that people are not still identified by their former or inactive titles – they are but in one respect use of that title is a constant reminder of the fact of what one was, rather than who one is. Being called by an active title is likewise a reaffirmation of the recognition one has – not only by one’s direct community members, but within the traditional system itself, imbued with the *manaman* (mana) of the chiefs

and ancestors by whom, or under whose authority, the titles are issued. Indeed, as mentioned above, one cannot be called by one's common name in the feasthouse. Only by having a title does one achieve full social status.

A title marks one as Pohnpeian in a Pohnpeian community, locating one in social and geographic space. While not every adult male has a title, each section participant will eventually receive one, when the time and circumstances are right. At that point they will retain the title unless they are stripped of it for cause. Alternatively they may be offered another title they deem to be preferable. This would typically be a more prestigious one at the section level, though sometimes at the hierarchically higher tribal district level. A Pohnpeian who should have a title but does not is regarded with disdain, a lesser class of person, *Kirou Poahr*.

In partial answer to the questions posed at the close of the previous section, one conclusion is that the Pohnpeian section system cannot be simply understood as either a transnational structure mixed with cosmopolitan genealogy or a traditional institution simply unmoored from place. It is neither simply diasporic nor relocated in the typical sense. Despite the fact that Kansas City is not identified geographically as Pohnpei, the section formation makes it a Pohnpeian place. What makes the community Pohnpeian is that the people are Pohnpeian, and what links them (beyond individual and family attachments) to Pohnpei is the Kansas City section organization – itself a hybrid, not possible in Pohnpei, due in large part to the multi-tribal identifications of its members.

The Kansas City section is a unique formation, relatable to other forms, but not a simple extension of any preexisting phenomena. It is an attempt to synthesize a lived duality, to reconcile a cognized contradiction (Ghorashi 2004:339). The constructed home is as much home as the remembered and imagined place of origin (ibid). The Pohnpeian section in Kansas

City exists to create a Pohnpeian place in diaspora and (ideally) to prepare a diasporic people for return and reintegration to their ultimate home by deploying the traditional section organization in direct connection to Pohnpei itself, the traditional chiefly hierarchy, and the related titles, communicating who one is and where one fits in social space in relation to other social actors within the context of the Pohnpeian universe of understandings. The Kansas City section may not be a place geographically *in* Pohnpei, but it is *of* Pohnpei – even more so than Guam is of Pohnpei or Mexican Chicago is of Mexico. Sociopolitically, the Kansas City section is *both* in *and* of Pohnpei. Sociopolitically, Pohnleng of Kansas City is as much Pohnpei as Pohnleng of Wene. They are both in the Kiti, and thus Pohnpeian, sociopolitical system that constitutes Pohnpeian places.

The Kansas City section is also not simply an extension of traditional hegemony exploiting the fruits of the labors of a diasporic community. Nor is it a new invention from whole cloth based on the imaginations of the Pohnpeians in Kansas City. The Kansas City section is a creative deployment of a traditional structure in a set of new conditions, here managing “transnational relations across boundaries” (Werbner 2002:126). In this vein, aspects of adaptation of tradition to new phenomena will be explored next.



## IX: Tradition, Reinvention of Tradition, and Traditioning

*We need to fulfill our traditional responsibilities to the section. This is what we do as Pohnpeians. It makes us Pohnpeians – we come together and mutually help one another. We are one community here. We pass on our traditions and customs to our children by showing them how to be Pohnpeian in what we do.* – translated excerpt from a speech given by a high-ranking Kansas City section member in September of 2012.

Thus far some of the dynamics of displaced communities have been discussed including how such communities form, as well as some of the implications this formation process has for the communities themselves. This includes the production of locality and the creation of place by the community. Particular attention has been paid to the impact of the sociopolitical aspect of the traditional section formation deployed in the Kansas City community of Pohnpeians. The factor that facilitates the necessary changes for successful community formation is tradition, specifically its modification by displaced communities. The term tradition (or traditional) is repeatedly and unproblematically used throughout this paper largely for convenience but also intentionally to draw attention to its frequent unproblematic deployment. Typical conceptions of tradition include anointed horizons conceived of as bounded spaces beyond which a people's behavior must not wander, as well as normative behaviors, values, and acceptable social practices.<sup>66</sup> Clearly tradition is not a static thing but is a term used to gloss ideal typical behaviors, attitudes, and institutions of a group of people at a certain time period (often believed to emanate from the distant past).

Accordingly, tradition is not constant but is produced in practice through the acting out of what are perceived by the actors as traditional behaviors. As indicated in the excerpt above, traditional activities are performances but they are also performative.<sup>67</sup> This places tradition itself in a perpetually precarious state in that it is always changing by accident or intent. The

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<sup>66</sup> (See Bhabha 1996:54, in Duarte 2005:330, Marshall 1994:537, in Muniz and O'Guinn 2001:413)

<sup>67</sup> This follows Judith Butler's (2006) discussion of performative and performativity in the context of gender.

dispositions of the people performing traditional acts, the inculcation of the underlying cultural norms and values, and the multiplicitous agents of change intersect in the act of performing tradition. People can use other cultural norms and values to assertively (consciously or not) alter tradition in its performance, changing the norm, shaping what is thereafter normative.

The phrase “invention of tradition” has taken on a number of meanings in the literature but two main veins emerge. Necessarily brief and incomplete summaries follow. The first entails intentional manipulation of collective memory by the state for its purposes (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983:1, Said 2000:179, Anagnost 1997:1). The second features a recognition that tradition and traditional culture are created in a complex ongoing process of reinvention impacted by multiple factors in unique situational articulation, driven by a circular process of peoples’ attempts to situate the present in terms of the past and interpret (or reinterpret) the past in terms of the present (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983:2,5, Hanson 1989:890, Clifford 2001:479, Anagnost 1997:5). This too can have political ramifications and motivations (Hanson 1989:898-899) and is shot through with power relations. Its deployment can be empowering, providing a way for first peoples to maintain distinctiveness and assert power and legitimacy in a world dominated by Western hegemony (Hanson 1989:891, Gegeo 2001:505).

Appadurai (1990:17-20) notes some of the particularly challenging (but also generative) elements of transmission of tradition in the context of diaspora which result in multiple fractal forms. Hanson (1989) and Sahlins (1999) emphasize the inventiveness of tradition, the “permutation of older forms and relationships, made appropriate to novel situations” (Sahlins 1999:408-409). Many of these principles are present in the deployment of the institution of Pohnpeian chieftainship in Kansas City. This creative adaptation of traditional forms leads to other changes in the ongoing reinvention of tradition. It has been mentioned that traditional

norms dictate that a title-holder on Pohnpei must relinquish his or her title upon long-term departure from the island. Due to a confluence of events involving increasing out-migration with intentions of return at some undetermined time and specific interpersonal relations, a crucial change has taken place. It has been successfully asserted that the fulfilling of one's *pwukoh* (which glosses as responsibilities to chiefs and community) should be the preeminent factor in retention of one's title and, crucially, one's position in the *ahlen mwahr* (or path of titles) progressing toward the paramountcy. Residence on Pohnpei is now becoming optional (in some circumstances).<sup>68</sup> In one district of the five on Pohnpei this aspect of tradition has been reinvented in light of the changing conditions brought on by globalization. It seems likely that the other tribal districts will follow suit in changing their interpretation of this crucial principle, probably soon.

The path of titles here applies to the paramount (versus section) level of organization. The absence of a specific active tribal district affiliation through section membership for many Pohnpeians living in diaspora is problematic and related adaptations are occurring to address this issue.<sup>69</sup> The incipient diasporic Pohnpeian section with a Madolenihmw tribal affiliation is a step in this direction. Its founder indicates that this section is not based on a particular location at all but rather Madolenihmw tribal affiliation for those living outside of Pohnpei. A section with tribal affiliation within which to fulfill one's traditional responsibilities facilitates the legitimate extension of the path of titles to Pohnpeians living outside of Pohnpei through their engagement with Pohnpei via the section. The section as a traditional sociopolitical formation is itself now adapted in multiple ways to mobility and diaspora.

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<sup>68</sup> The limits of this change are as yet undetermined. It is difficult to feature the paramount or the executive chiefs at the tribal district level living anywhere other than Pohnpei, but one day they may.

<sup>69</sup> Tribal membership seems relatively immutable, but can be changed by relocation to another tribal district on Pohnpei. The various clans can be found in multiple tribes, so there is flexibility here. It remains to be seen if tribal affiliation can be changed by aligning oneself with diasporic sections with tribal affiliations.

This is a crucial development bound up with the extension of the section organization to diasporic Pohnpei. Absent section organization, there is no structure outside of Pohnpei through which one can conduct efficacious traditional activities, particularly maintenance of titles so crucial to social life. Section organization and participation allow people to cement their identity as Pohnpeians with section-level titles, fulfill their responsibilities to chiefs, and now facilitates the maintenance of certain individuals' positions in the tribal districts' paths of titles. Although it is ideally a Kiti section, the Kansas City section draws membership from all five Pohnpeian districts, marking it in some respects as a pan-Pohnpeian section which is a unique distinction.<sup>70</sup>

The history of these changes of tradition is intrinsically bound up with the evolution of the deployment of a traditional section form of community organization of Pohnpei in a diasporic community in Kansas City. The physical absence of the Kansas City section chief from his section is a key development as well. As has been mentioned, he reportedly participates in the Pohnpeian activities as a section chief should, and his section in Kansas City continues to function and produce. It has been noted that the use of the word tradition serves as a reference point, a place holder, for comparative purposes. Tradition is often perceived as a stable reference point, but it is in constant flux. Its relationship to other points of reference and its (perceived relatively constant) distance from them is what provides this sense of stability as opposed to constituting a fixed Archimedean point. Thus, Hanson (1989:899) suggests "that invention is an ordinary event in the development of all discourse, which therefore never rests on a permanent foundation. From this point of view truth and knowledge stem – and always have stemmed – from inventions in the decentered play of sign substitutions" (see also Clifford 2001:472-475).

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<sup>70</sup> While most members are consanguinal or affinal kin linked to Kiti, there are section members from the other tribal districts. The one tribe that seems to display some reticence to Kansas City section activities absent affinal ties is Madolenihmw. In this sense, the Kansas City section is paradoxically both a Kiti section and a pan-Pohnpeian section.

Tradition is not opposed to modernity; it provides connections across time and space and can be regarded as “traditioning” to emphasize the processual nature of this phenomenon (Clifford 1994:320-321). Productive versions of traditioning (laced with nostalgic yearnings) relate to the near-universal search for rootedness (Malkki 1992:24), a deep longing for situatedness in the world. This is not to say that the roots cannot and do not move (Malkki 1992:37) but simply that there is a desire to be attached to something that is attached to something else, to have some depth of meaning and relatedness to others (Malkki 1992:37-38, Turton 2005:258). Traditioning is utilized as a way of linking us to ours – past, present, and future – in meaningful relationships in a world of others (often in motion).

This process of ongoing invention of tradition is central to the overall argument of this thesis. Indeed we could say that tradition is in a process of constant renewal and is perpetually reinvented. The primary reason that the section system of Pohnpei has been successfully extended to Kansas City is that the literal organization of the section has undergone successive metaphorical extensions, allowing it to be unmoored from physical location and become rooted in imagined connections to Pohnpei as a conceptual entity rather than a strictly geographically-bounded physical place. Although the potential for place-making travels with individuals, their ability to form as a group with shared consciousness makes place mobile. People make places out of spaces, and the identity of the group spills over into the identity of the place.

Pohnpeians in Kansas City still regard themselves as Pohnpeians just as most all migrant communities would conceive of themselves as people of their respective homelands (Appadurai 1996, Marshall 2004). Pohnpeians’ efforts at maintaining their essence as Pohnpeians is facilitated by their formal community organization, itself present in the organization of people around imagined connections to place, derived from the traditional direct relationship to place

(Hanlon 2004:209-210). This imagined tie to place is made real by virtue of the section organization which extends the Pohnpeian sociopolitical system to the United States. The name of the section further marks the area it covers out as Pohnpeian (Basso 1996, in Marshall 2004). By naming the section after a place of historical prestige, which features the added salience of being linked to the way Pohnpeians reach Kansas City as a physical location, the paramount chief of the tribal district of Kiti brought Pohnpei to Kansas City. By the traditional authority of a paramount tribal district chief exercised in a community of Pohnpeian people, Pohnpei as a physical place is bootstrapped up into Kansas City.

The ongoing reinvention of tradition seen in these metaphorical extensions of salient Pohnpeian principles seems to have roots in the aspect of the system that Petersen cogently identifies as the key to the section system's continued dynamism and relevancy – the titles (Petersen 1982a). Take for instance the penultimate title of Pohnpeian tribes – the title of titles – Nahnmwarki. It has been noted that Nahnmwarki translates as “Master of Titles.” This name is related directly to one of its titleholder's responsibilities. The Nahnmwarki literally grants titles, removes them, and generally manages them in his structural position as the head of his people. The literal translation of the title identifies what it does, but the title, Nahnmwarki, signifies much more than that; it connotes a crucial place in the social hierarchy.

Another high title, *Nahnpei*, glosses as “Lord of the Altar” (Riesenberg 1968:10), and *Nahn Kirou* as “Lord of the Husbanders” (ibid). Lord of the Altar may no longer oversee sacrifices and Lord of the Husbanders does not manage the overseers but the prestige remains attached to these titles. The literal function is gone but the implication that the titleholders provide crucial, prestigious functions in Pohnpeian society is alive. Despite changes in apparent function, the

titles' place in the system remains essentially unchanged, perpetuating the established order, situating people in the world by rank.

This is one of the key aspects of the section system. It allows Pohnpeians to locate their existence in the world by the titles they have. The source of the titles themselves is worth revisiting briefly. The paramount chief is the master of titles for the district and the section heads; the section chief likewise manages titles in his section. Petersen (1982a) notes that there has been a shift in Pohnpeian chieftainships' emphasis on matrilineally controlled land to matrilineally controlled titles, themselves tied to the land. This has facilitated the legitimate extension of the section from one based in the land in Pohnpei to one based on Pohnpeian people, as is so clearly observable in the Kansas City section. The focus has shifted from a land:title connection to a labor:title relation. Likewise, the first-fruits offerings have shifted from produce from the land (facilitated by labor) to produce from labor (with a metaphorical tie to land). This looks like the following – first-fruits:*wahnsapw* (fruits of the land) to first-fruits:cash.<sup>71</sup> In each of these deployments of the previous governing principles, the basic structure of the relation (Sahlins 1999) remains the same, but there is a sign substitution (Hanson 1989); titles that were formerly linked to produce from the land are now connected to money from labor. The titles remain the linchpin of the system but how they are justified within it changes with the times. In a sense, these changes are a form of cultural selection involving descent with modification. The organic metaphor can be carried further as a means of illustration.

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<sup>71</sup> In this case, there was actually an intermediary step involving trade goods, but that can be addressed in more detail at another time. In each of these cases, with the land:labor:title relation and the produce:cash:first-fruits connection, the interference of Western powers and, critically, Pohnpeian adaptation to this interference is important, and sometimes generative.

Gregory Bateson held that the fundamental “unit of survival is a flexible organism-in-its environment” (Bateson 1972:451), not just the reproducing organism itself. The connection of organism and environment in a healthy symbiosis is crucial. Following Petersen (1982a) the fundamental unit of survival of Pohnpeians as Pohnpeians is the traditional section – it incorporates organism and environment into this single unit. This unity is noted in Pohnpei historically, in post-contact times, and now in Kansas City (Hanlon 1988:208, Petersen 1982a). Though the environment Pohnpeians find themselves in has changed through the prehistoric, historic, and modern periods, the section has remained as the connection between community and location, the tie binding them together.

The environment to which Pohnpeian people are now adapting is the world in this era of globalization, with its concomitant increase in speed of communication, frequency of movement, and emphasis on the money economy. The money economy has already been integrated into the traditional Pohnpeian prestige economy with the shift from first-fruits in the form of crops borne of the land (and fostered by labor) to cash, directly from labor. The facilitating factor connecting Pohnpeians and their environment, and the resulting unit itself, remains the section system. Petersen sees the section as the fundamental unit of Pohnpeian community, and we find it here to be flexible, durable, and now mobile – as it is deployed in Kansas City.



## **X: Kansas City as a Pohnpeian Place**

*When the Nahnmwarki of Kiti came to Kansas City, we pounded sakau, the Nahnmwarki drank the first cup, and he formed the kousapw of Kansas City as an official section under his authority [manaman]. The Nahnmwarki gave the section chief the title “Soumaka en Pohnleng en Kansas City.” Pohnleng is near Ohlapel in Pohnpei. This is a very sacred place in Pohnpeian history. – Pohnpeian eyewitness and participant in the formation process of the Kansas City section.*

### ***The Traditional Section System in Kansas City and its Implications for Conceptions of Place***

This essay has covered how Pohnpeians construct community in Kansas City with particular reference to the traditional section system. It has extended Petersen’s research on Pohnpeian section organization and dynamics to the context of a diasporic community in the United States and filled a gap in the literature by studying a Pohnpeian community in diaspora. The interrelated concepts of diaspora and relocation, imagined community, ongoing reinvention of tradition (all laced with nostalgia) are explored. Place is conceived of as more mobile than has been typically appreciated. Place is constructed by people in a community, facilitated by experiential overlaps, mutually intelligible experiences and standards, with reference to a commonly accessible history. The diasporic community of Pohnpeians in Kansas City constructs place in connection with Pohnpei utilizing these principles. The Kansas City section formation facilitates this, particularly in contexts generated by section organization which produces Pohnpeian sensibilities and cultural competencies – making Pohnpeian places of American spaces.

### ***Challenges to Kansas City as a Pohnpeian Place and Propositions for Reconciliation***

When asked directly Pohnpeians allow that the places they inhabit in Kansas City are decidedly Pohnpeian. To be clear, no Pohnpeian has volunteered of Kansas City, “this is Pohnpei.” To them, it is not (or not exactly) Pohnpei for two primary reasons. First, Pohnpei as a geographic location holds a privileged status, featuring place histories of crucial significance

(Hanlon 2004). Pohnpei is a sacred place to Pohnpeians. But some Pohnpeians fear that Pohnpei is “becoming a little brown America.” It is not immune to infiltration, itself becoming something else – a place of a different sort. If Pohnpeians fear that Pohnpei is becoming a little brown America, why can parts of America, specifically Kansas City, not become Pohnpeian places? This is a two-way street – actually, it is one of multiple pathways accessible in and through various mediums. Regardless of how this is parsed, movement does cut both ways (from America to Pohnpei and back again in an almost continuous feedback loop). Kansas City may not be Pohnpei in the historical sense that Wene is but the section in Kansas City with its connections to Wene, such bearing the Pohnleng name, is clearly connected to Pohnpei in the minds of Pohnpeians. Thus, Kansas City *is* Pohnpei; it is a Pohnpeian place. The primary difference between Pohnleng of Kansas City and Pohnleng of Wene as places in the Pohnpeian constellation of places is one of duration. It is of magnitude not of kind, of period rather than nature.<sup>72</sup>

Kansas City has been a location in the Pohnpeian consciousness for decades. Many Pohnpeians can establish a direct tie to it through a close relative. Pohnpeians are mobile (and have been at least since contact with Europeans, as Sturges [in Hanlon 1988] lamented over one hundred and fifty years ago) – they cannot be fixed to place or property. Not surprisingly, Pohnpei proper will retain its privileged status in the minds of Pohnpeians, but Kansas City has occupied an important place in that constellation of places for decades. Its visibility continues to brighten; its prominence grows. The formation of the section in Kansas City enhances this considerably. Kansas City is a place in the traditional Pohnpeian sociopolitical system which

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<sup>72</sup> Pohnpei is Pohnpeian because it has been inhabited by Pohnpeians, as the dominant group, for over a millennium, possible two. But that domination took time, is retroactively constructed in the Pohnpeian imagination, and is more contested and varied than is typically appreciated (Hanlon 1988, 2004, Bernart 1977).

grants the section chief a seat at councils in Pohnpei and entitles him to compensation to which only Pohnpeian (specifically Kiti) section chiefs have claim.

Second, the United States is a different geographical location and political entity than Pohnpei. Pohnpeians readily accept and note this distinction. The geopolitical problem is in a way less of an issue as Pohnpeians know that Pohnpei became Pohnpei as its people became Pohnpeian (Hanlon 1988). As it pertains to the Kansas City community, different people make different places out of the same geographic space. Virtual communities are not new, but these were based on technology (e.g. the importance of print capitalism in Benedict's conception of imagined communities), economic interests, not tribal identity which typically requires proximity and cooperative physical activity for the generation of affective attachments. Likewise, France is French because its people are. The people are French because of who and how they are, influenced by geographic spaces, creating French places. Place is about shared meaning; the physical environment is largely coincidental with places and people.

The United States features a complex dynamic, in which retention of ethnic identities is often valorized (though the U.S. relationship to ethnic minorities is checkered at best). For instance, May was Asian American and Pacific Islander heritage month in the United States. The U.S. is a geopolitical entity that ostensibly welcomes those of other heritages, celebrates them, and even at times grants them preferential privileges.

Pohnpeians predictably recognize the United States and Pohnpei as different political entities. Interestingly, "the Compact" has served to loosen the bonds and expand bounds of Pohnpei.<sup>73</sup> By not requiring work visas and allowing virtually unfettered access to United States labor markets, the Compact has opened the floodgates of migration by Pohnpeians (and other

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<sup>73</sup> The irony of "compact's" intended meaning as a promise in this context will be left to stand on its own, as the United States has repeatedly changed the rules (or at least their interpretation) (Petersen 1985, Hanlon 1998).

Micronesians) to center by those at the periphery. In this respect, Pohnpeians are occupying America, creating Pohnpeian places in American spaces. A sociopolitical formation, based on traditional Pohnpeian chiefly authority exists right in the middle of America, with no apology offered to and no permission sought from the hostland.<sup>74</sup>

Despite its formational link to Kiti, the Kansas City section has been characterized by section members as a pan-Pohnpeian section in an effort to be inclusive of those with other tribal identifications.<sup>75</sup> The section aspires to transcend tribal affiliation (and in some respects it does); its section organization, chiefs and other title-holders, and activities are thus Pohnpeian.<sup>76</sup> These formations, people, and events exist, live, and occur in Kansas City, marking it as a Pohnpeian place. When section activities transpire, these aspects achieve their full manifestations. Recall my reaction to feast attendance. It was not an experience of an American event in Kansas City, or even a Pohnpeian one in an American place. The people, their activities, and the place they occupied, in connection with geographic space, *all* seemed Pohnpeian.

Kansas City is a Pohnpeian place. It is one of many in the constellation of Pohnpeian places. Formal section organization is a crucial development in bringing Pohnpei to Kansas City. Indeed, where Pohnpeians come together in section events, with the uniquely Pohnpeian activities and necessary usage of formal titles, there Pohnpei is among them. Kansas City has existed in the minds of Pohnpeians for decades as a location where Pohnpeians live and make

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<sup>74</sup> This hints at the breakdown of the nation-state which so many others have commented upon.

<sup>75</sup> The apparent paradox of a Kiti-specific tribal affiliation coinciding with a pan-Pohnpeian aura of the section has been noted above. Indeed, the dance group that the Kansas City section fielded at the Micronesian Women's Day celebration was called the M.U.K. group for Madolenihmw, U, and Kiti. It is a paradox that a Kiti-specific section incorporates multiple tribes, but one which section members unproblematically reconcile. Non-section members, particularly of the Madolenihmw tribe, have a different take on the matter.

<sup>76</sup> Whether the Kansas City section is consistently Kiti-specific or always pan-Pohnpeian is an interesting issue, but the end result is that Kiti-specific, pan-Pohnpeian, or a unique blend, the section, its activities, and titles are of Pohnpei.

lives. The *Kousapw en Pohnleng en Kansas City* puts Kansas City on the map of Pohnpeian sociopolitical places; it is a Pohnpeian section like – and yet unlike – any other.

## **VII: Conclusion**

This study of the Pohnpeian community in Kansas City leads to three primary conclusions about its various aspects. First, it falls broadly under the heading of displaced communities, but it has aspects of both diasporic and relocated communities. Second, the section organization found in the Kansas City community is unique among displaced communities, even Pohnpeian ones. This constitutes a creative deployment of traditional principles and an extension of a traditionally land-based institution. Third, the organization of the Kansas City section brings Pohnpei to Kansas City as a Pohnpeian sociopolitical entity located geographically apart from Pohnpei but connected directly to it, and existing within its sociopolitical boundary.

The category of displaced communities is partially reconceived as the broad heading under which relocated, diasporic, and migratory communities fall. The Pohnpeian section in Kansas City features aspects of all three of these categories. An indigenous sociopolitical system, the section, overlays the displaced community as would be expected in a relocated community but all of the proverbial boxes of typical conceptions of diasporic communities can also be checked. Like members of migratory communities, Pohnpeians in Kansas City regard their stay as temporary, anticipating an actual physical return to Pohnpei in their lifetimes.

Kansas City was organized as a traditional section within the Pohnpeian sociopolitical system by the paramount chief of the tribal district of Kiti. The Kansas City section is a diasporic capital in Butler's (2001) terms. Other diasporic Pohnpeian communities are frequently drawn to Kansas City for Pohnpeian events, including the Micronesian Women's Day celebration and Labor Day baseball tournaments. It is also reminiscent of a capital section of Pohnpei (Riesenberg 1968). In this sense, the Kansas City section has some prominence in relation to

other Pohnpeian communities in the mainland United States as the home of the ranking chief in the geographic locale.

The Pohnpeian section organization in Kansas City is based upon and connected to section organization in Pohnpei itself, but it is not replicated unchanged. Pohnpeian titles are conferred on Kansas City section members, with some variation. Pohnpei is not unaffected by the dynamics of its diasporic communities, particularly Kansas City. The traditional practice of stripping those people migrating away from Pohnpei of their titles has been challenged by the migrants, with recent success. The Kansas City section chief's position as a legitimate leader of a section not physically located on Pohnpei has been accepted on the home island. In what is a historical paradox, the section chief retains his title from a section not physically based on Pohnpei, despite living outside of his section (as it happens, on Pohnpei itself).

The dynamism of Pohnpeian culture is on display in Kansas City. The active nature and creative deployment of tradition in response to changing political motivations, culture contact, and articulation with other cultures is apparent (Bateson 1935, Hanson 1989, Sahlins 1999, Clifford 2001). The intersection of traditional principles, structures, and institutions has facilitated the ongoing reinvention of tradition, deployment of structural relationships in novel situations, and modification of institutions, both in Kansas City and on the home island. Unique articulations emerge from the contact of cultures, mediated and facilitated by technologies and influenced by global geopolitical forces.

Pohnpeians in Kansas City retain a direct link to their homeland. This connection is conceived of through the Pohnpeian sociopolitical system and is thus not primarily imagined in the sense that it is without basis in social relations. This is a departure from the authors on displacement cited above who see communities and connections as less tangible than they are

experienced by Pohnpeians. The section system provides a mechanism by which the relationship between the Kansas City community and the Pohnpeian homeland can be incorporated into traditional chieftainship, maintaining relationships between people and continuity of identity, all via the concomitant titles featured in the sociopolitical system of Pohnpei.

This sociopolitical system now extends to Kansas City, marking it as a Pohnpeian place by virtue of the aforementioned chain of events, articulating with dynamic Pohnpeian traditions and adaptable structures and institutions. The Kansas City section has been characterized by some community members as a Pohnpeian section, rather than a Kiti section (as it is officially organized), marking it as a twice hybridized formation, as it is a Pohnpeian section not situated on historically Pohnpeian land as was heretofore the case for all sections. The Kansas City section is one based on Pohnpeian people, with a metaphorical tie to Pohnpeian land, facilitated by the naming of the section, connecting it to a Pohnpeian location with historical prestige and purchase within the Kansas City community. When section members come together in traditional activities, utilizing the titles that are so crucially a part of Pohnpeian identity, they bring Pohnpei to Kansas City, by the authority of a traditional paramount chief. As a part of Pohnpei's sociopolitical system, Kansas City is Pohnpei. Wherever Pohnpeians are gathered together, particularly in section activities implicated by the institution of chieftainship and utilizing the concomitant titles, there Pohnpei is among them – including in Kansas City.



## Appendix A: Maps & Images

### Maps of Micronesia and Pohnpei

<sup>i</sup> Regional Map: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/fm.html>  
Caroline Islands: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/fm.html>  
Pohnpei: [http://www.visit-micronesia.fm/state/p\\_fun.html](http://www.visit-micronesia.fm/state/p_fun.html)

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Images from two of the section (*kousapw*) feasts (*kamadipw*) in the fall of 2012



ii

[Preparations for one of the *kousapw* (section) feasts in the fall of 2012.]



[People get situated for the official start of one of the fall 2012 feasts.]



[Dancing remains a highlight of the feasts for section members young and old.]





[A prominent female section member represents a new title recipient and drinks *sakau* (kava) in recognition of acceptance of the conferred title. The executive chief looks on in the background awaiting the conclusion of this portion of the ceremony so he can proceed with the announcement of other new titles to be conferred.]

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#### Mapping Pohnpei onto Kansas City

<sup>iii</sup> Kansas City: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interstate\\_435](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interstate_435)  
Pohnpei: <http://facultyuog.net/RFK/digimicro/Maps/Pohnpei.htm>

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#### Kiti Sections

<sup>iv</sup> See Riesenbergs's (1968:24) map of the sections of Kiti as they existed then.

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#### Sakau Ceremony

<sup>v</sup> (The images are not records of the actual event described above but rather general illustrations of how *sakau* is prepared and served.)

<http://www.comfsm.fm/~dleeling/sakau/sakau.html>  
<http://bygonebureau.com/2013/02/26/what-i-learned-on-the-island-of-pohnpei/>

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